Widescreen Dreams
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I

After seeing *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) for the first time when it premiered on television in 1979, I began to fantasize at length and in detail about making love with Al Pacino, who played Sonny Wortzik, a Catholic, bisexual, big-hearted, small-time Brooklyn bank robber.

By this time I was fifteen years old, a sophomore at Holy Name High School, was feeling intermittent anxiety that I might be gay, and had fooled around sexually the previous summer with my friend James, much to our subsequent shame, while we did volunteer work in the office of a local cerebral palsy services agency. The idea that James and I were using these poor disabled people, and the nurses and social workers who ministered to them and who needed our assistance, to find occasions for pulling each other’s pants down and doing things with each other’s cocks when no one was looking or when the office was empty except for ourselves, was too much for my already always-guilty conscience to bear. James and I never talked about what had happened between us, and of course I never told anyone else, not even my parents, who repeatedly assured me and my siblings that no matter what it was we could tell them anything, we should never feel as if we had anything to hide from them, there was nothing we could do or say that could ever make them stop loving us—they might get angry, they might feel disappointed, but they would love us no matter what. Somehow I knew that this was a lot more complicated than they made it sound.

When the summer and our volunteer work ended, I thought, I’ll never look at anyone with cerebral palsy, or at James, again. But James would remain my estranged high school classmate for the next three years, even though we quickly drifted into different circles of friends, took dif-
ferent classes (mine were all "advanced placement," his remedial), and generally managed, politely, to ignore each other completely. The last I heard, James had entered an ROTC program.

I kept many more secrets from the world when I was growing up than just my occasional sex encounters with James. No one knew it, but since about the time I was ten, my interior life was dominated by the fantasy that I was an important, hugely talented, Hollywood actor. I was always me in my dreams; just as Barbra Streisand didn't change her name or her nose when she became a star, I basically didn't change anything about myself—my name, my age, my short height, the sound (embarrassingly effeminate) of my voice, my blue eyes, my red hair, my freckles. I wanted to make sure, also like Barbra Streisand, that when I became famous, everyone would know it was still me. I wanted to rub their faces in it (fig. 21).

At some point in my preadolescence, I realized that I could escape into a world inside my head where I had power and freedom, while on the outside I simply bounced a basketball in front of our house. There was a hoop over the garage doors and a basketball key painted on the driveway, so while I imagined I was Barbra Streisand leading the well-dressed citizens of Yonkers to the train station, singing "All aboard!" like a whistle blowing or a siren calling, as everyone boarded the train, rushing past her like beautiful, strong horses jumping fences in a race, or while I fantasized about what my next film project would be or about the lukewarm reviews I was getting on my most recent film, for the rest of the world I was perfecting my basketball shot. (I loved getting "lukewarm" reviews for my performances and films. It made more sense than the praise my parents always heaped upon me for whatever it was I had done—played the piano, built a model airplane or house, painted a picture; their praise never seemed 100 percent sincere to me, whereas mixed praise at least meant that the critic had thought long and hard about what you had done and that you were being taken seriously and not being dismissed with kindness.)

Now and then I would let members of my family join me on the court for games of "Around the World" or "HORSE" (a shorter variation was "PIG") or "21" (which seemed endless), but mostly I craved solitude, and I got privately furious whenever anybody would come outside to watch me shoot, or to talk to me, or to ask if they could play along. I didn't even like it when my mother would watch me, as she often did, from the dining room window—she could see my lips moving, I was sure, when I talked to myself. And in the fall and spring she would turn off the air conditioning and open up the windows, so that the noises I
Figure 21. Thirteen years old, spring 1977.
made, the things I was saying and singing, could be heard through the window screen or through the screen door of the kitchen, where she worked much of the long day preparing dinner, doing wash, ironing, making and receiving telephone calls, marking her calendar.

Sometimes when I would be singing a song, gamboling about on the driveway, the orchestra building to a climactic, sizzling drum roll, aiming to shoot the basketball from the middle of the court, the camera zooming in for a close-up, I would turn to shoot, and there at the window stood my mother, looking at me. Our eyes met. A blood-rush of embarrassment ran cold through my entire body. I had been observed. How long had she been standing there? (I resumed my basketball playing as if nothing had happened.) What would I say if later she asked me, casually, as she sometimes did, I thought I heard you singing when you were outside playing—what were you singing? (She lingered there in the window in silence for another moment.) What did she think of me now? What was the expression on her face?

When I turned to look for her again, she was gone.

My imagination went everywhere in those days—from Reading to New York to Hollywood to London, on location in the Soviet Union. I had made eleven films by the time I was nineteen, and since I had only made my first film in 1977 when I was thirteen, that meant eleven films in seven years. But in real life, by the 1970s at least, Hollywood movies couldn’t be made that fast, so I had to do some manipulation of the facts to handle my overwhelming career ambitions. For example, my first film, I decided, was really made in 1976 but wasn’t released until 1977. That made eleven films in eight years—still not plausible; basically I was aiming for one film per year. In two of the films I played supporting roles, so I figured that I could make two films in one year if I had a minor part in at least one of those films. And if I needed to, I could allow myself to jump ahead a year or two and pretend that the film I was currently involved in would be made and released in, say, 1983, when in fact at the time I was living in the year 1981. And sometimes, in order to gain a year or two, I would abandon a film project (much to producers’, critics’, my agent’s, and the public’s dismay) either because I realized that the film didn’t have any substance to it (at one point, I had begun filming a big-budget musical starring me and Andrea McArdle, then the star of Broadway’s Annie, but I just couldn’t come up with any kind of plot that would include the both of us, so I quit the picture) or because the film I had started to make turned out to be too derivative of some actual film I had just seen (for a long time, I worked on an epic musical that was a bizarre coming together of Hello, Dolly!, Mame, and Walt Disney World’s
Main Street, which I visited in 1973 and fell instantly, madly in love with—but the film was plagued by script problems, so I eventually had to give this one up, too). Once I realized that I could make these mental leaps—in moderation, of course—I immediately felt more at ease. I was always worried about being as honest with myself as I possibly could be.

In my film debut, I played an obedient, musically inclined but unathletic boy who dies from being underappreciated by his parents, played by Louise Fletcher and Edward Fox. I won best actor for this astonishing performance. In my second film, I played a nice young boy whose father, played by Gregory Peck, murders him after losing a presidential election. For this I won best supporting actor, thereby convincing anyone who might have doubted it that the brilliant success of my first film was not just a fluke. (Cybill Shepherd played my older sister in the film, a performance critics are still calling the best of her career, though, incredibly, she didn’t even get an Oscar nomination for it.) In my next film, I played a younger-than-average college freshman (he was allowed to skip a few grades in high school—lucky him) who has an affair with one of his professors, played by Meryl Streep, and in one controversial scene, he has sex with both her and her Siberian husky. I was nominated again for best actor for my performance in this film, but I lost it to Dustin Hoffman because, you know, they can’t keep giving it to the same person every year.

Seeing Al Pacino’s performance in *Dog Day Afternoon*, however, permanently altered my fantasy life by making me realize that, at least in my head, I could play a gay person, and that being gay wasn’t, as I had felt, shameful, frightening, not to be spoken of or even thought about. Being gay, as Al Pacino played it, suddenly seemed attractive, nerve-racking, authoritative, irresistible—above all, possible.

II

*Dog Day Afternoon* begins unexpectedly with a lengthy montage of scenes of a hot summer afternoon in New York City. We see, among other things, first one, then three Circle Line sight-seeing boats at the midtown docks; a dog rooting through garbage; a kid jumping, *splash!*, into a swimming pool; fat construction workers digging and standing in a ditch; someone watering his small patch of front lawn in Queens; someone else hosing down a city sidewalk; a highway tollbooth with a sign saying “PASSENGER CARS 50¢”; an airplane ascending overhead across the humid, gray-blue sky; people playing tennis; the outdoor café, a dense patch of umbrella tables, at Rockefeller Center; old people, one under an umbrella, chatting on the boardwalk at Coney Island; some-
Coming Out, with Al Pacino

one sunning himself by a reflecting pool at the base of a skyscraper; a man lying on his back on the sidewalk in the sun; a woman (who we'll later discover is Sonny Wortzik's female wife, Angie—he also has a male "wife" named Leon) walking with her two kids, and a straight couple crossing the street toward them as the girl squeezes her boyfriend's ass; a lime-green Volkswagen Karmann Ghia in the middle of a highway traffic jam; sanitation workers tossing empty garbage cans onto the sidewalk; speedboats zipping along a crowded shore; several young women with a baby carriage, chatting on sidewalk benches; a Dannon yogurt truck lumbering down a Brooklyn street in front of a bank; the massive New Calvary Cemetery in Queens; an electronic Kent cigarette sign that reads "2:57 P.M."; and a street cleaning truck slowly passing in front of the same Brooklyn bank and, now, a parked car in which Sonny and his accomplices talk over last-minute details.

Unlike other 1970s films whose visions of pre-gentrified New York City tend to appeal to a disapproving yet still prurient suburban sensibility, including Al Pacino's Serpico (1973), about corruption in the police department, as well as Network (1976), about corruption in the television industry, Dog Day Afternoon (like Serpico, Network, and The Wiz, directed by Sidney Lumet) shows an urban scene that is both dirty and livable, ugly and pleasurable. The camera is positioned among the people and things it films; in several shots, a vehicle passing by is made to appear so physically close to the camera that it momentarily disorients the viewer's perspective. A third of the images include water, restorative and abundant—the sequence almost looks like an "I Love New York" tourist advertisement. The people in these images are dogged; they go about their business, take advantage of the sun and water, and survive the heat. Most of them are not isolated but located within family and friendship networks, and the two who are alone (one sunning himself by a reflecting pool, the other sunning himself on the sidewalk) seem blissfully so. Crowds are an inevitable, but not necessarily an unpleasant or dehumanizing, part of the urban scene; indeed, in the midst of crowds, human touch abounds—the young man's butt, the lime-colored car, the time of day in lights, "PASSENGER CARS 50¢." These workaday images of water, pleasure, and the Volk, all of them exuberantly out of doors, confer a baptismal blessing over the entire film, setting a charitable tone of forgiveness and preparing us to feel ourselves part of the events and characters (criminal, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, violent) that we are about to witness.

Sung during the opening sequence as a voice-over (not, however, obliterating the cacophony of city sounds, but rather coexisting with them), Elton John's "Amoreena" echoes, but also complicates, the mean-
ing of these prologue images. The song features an exultant piano, organ, and guitar, spluttering drums, overall a lush, orchestral sound; and Elton John's epicene, pubescent-sounding voice hyperexpressively adds coloratura to the melody. Lifted for the film off of Elton's 1970 album *Tumbleweed Connection*, a song cycle about old soldiers, the Old South, and the bittersweet pleasures of life on the frontier, "Amoreena" recalls a mythical female beloved whose absence is both mourned and relished; the singer describes lusty, golden days spent with his now-distant "lady," eating apples, running through cornfields, dreaming of "crystal streams," "rolling through the hay like a puppy child." The effect is to invest the film's images of mediocrity, work, middlebrow lifestyles, deteriorating bodies, and urban sprawl with a keen, pastoral wholesomeness that produces, finally, not irony or detachment or alienation (each a hallmark effect of classic 1970s cinema), but a roving, Whitmanesque sense of innocence, affirmation, sentimentality, and hope.

Ensconced inside the bank he has tried unsuccessfully to rob in order to pay for his boyfriend Leon's sex-change operation, Sonny has taken hostages and is negotiating with police captain Eugene Moretti (played by Charles Durning) and FBI agent Sheldon (James Broderick) for safe passage out of the country with his partner-in-crime, Sal (John Cazale). As day turns into night, a crowd of people gathers to witness the showdown between Sonny and the authorities. The film, based on a true story, is structured around thirteen "coming out" scenes in each of which Sonny comes out of the bank in order to negotiate with the police and, on one occasion, to talk with his mother (fig. 22). In the most famous of these scenes, Sonny stirs up the crowd of onlookers by telling the police to put their guns down and invoking the name of the New York state prison, Attica, where, in September of 1971, a prisoners' insurrection was put down by the National Guard, leaving thirty-nine prisoners and nine prison guards dead:

**SONNY:** [referring to a cop approaching him with a gun] Hey, what's he doing?
**MORRETTI:** [to the cop] Will you get back?
**SONNY:** What are they movin' in there for? Get on back there man! He wants to kill me so bad he can taste it! Attica! [the crowd cheers] Attica! Attica! Attica! Attica! Put your guns down! Tell 'em to put their guns down! They'll kill us all! Put the fucking guns down! Put 'em down! Put 'em down! Attica! Attica! [to the crowd] You got it, man! You got it, man!

When I first saw *Dog Day Afternoon*, however, I knew nothing of the political and historical context for this and other scenes where Sonny
wrangles with the police. What I saw and heard, instead, was a confrontation between a sympathetic, disobedient young man (a child, practically) and a series of parental figures who often seem to bear Sonny no ill will but who, along with Sonny, are trapped in circumstances that make authentic communication impossible. In my mind, the bank became a metaphor for Sonny's interior life—his private, fragile, emotional world; Sonny's crime (robbing a bank) a metaphor for Sonny's deviant, gay identity (although it isn't until at least midway through the film that we actually learn that Sonny is gay); and everyone's efforts to lure him out of the bank a metaphor for the misguided efforts on the part of his loved ones to understand him and to reestablish their connection to him. By robbing the bank and hoiling himself up inside it, Sonny has acted, as if for the first time in his life, on his own impulses, done what he thinks is best for him and nobody else. If he comes out of the bank now, he will come out a new person. So the question becomes, on whose terms and to what end will he come out? Will he come out to satisfy the needs of the very people whose authority he is trying to slough off, or will he come out in order to affirm himself? What is the best, safest, and most meaningful way for him to come out?

In one “coming out” scene, the police have just tried to break into
the bank through the back door. Inside, Sonny fires a shot in return, prompting Moretti to summon him outside to talk:

**MORETTI:** C'mon out, Sonny. Sonny, come on out. Come on out here now. Come on out, Sonny. Sonny? Come on out here Sonny. [Sonny comes out; Moretti shouts angrily at him] What the fuck is the matter with you? [. . .]

**SONNY:** [also shouting angrily] Get somebody to talk to me. I'm not talking to you anymore.

**MORETTI:** Let me talk to you. Let me talk to you. Aw, now wait, hold it a second.

**SONNY:** Yeah, you tell me one thing, then you do another. What're they doin' back there?

**MORETTI:** I don't know what the fuck they were doin' back there.

**SONNY:** Yeah, you don't know—you're full of shit. You don't know.

**MORETTI:** I got a force back there, a tactical force—

**SONNY:** A tactical force, yeah, yeah—

**MORETTI:** —they like to shoot, they like to jump on ropes, they like to climb in through windows.

**SONNY:** They like that, right? Without your orders, right? Without your orders.

**MORETTI:** No!—Yes! Without my orders, yes!

**SONNY:** How do I know you're not gonna come through the roof?

**MORETTI:** 'Cause I'm telling you that we're not.

**SONNY:** Yeah, you're tellin' me a lot of things but you're not doin' 'em.

**MORETTI:** Oh goddamn, when I told you—

**SONNY:** What were they doin' back there, that's what I want to know!

**MORETTI:** I don't know what they were doin'.

**SONNY:** You can't answer me. You can't answer me.

**MORETTI:** What?

**SONNY:** You can't answer me.

**MORETTI:** Yes, I can answer you.

**SONNY:** Tell me what they were doin'.

**MORETTI:** We don't have our communication set up there. No communications.

**SONNY:** Look, I got a guy in there—I got a guy in there's gonna kill somebody, that's your responsibility, understand? Not mine, that's yours.

**MORETTI:** [no longer shouting] Now wait a minute, hold a second, listen. We got everything you wanted.

**SONNY:** [starting to calm down] Oh yeah?

**MORETTI:** Yeah, we can't get a helicopter in here, but we got a bus coming. We got a jet coming into Kennedy. All right? Okay? All right? Now we got a—we got a hold of your wife—your wife is coming—we've reached her, and she's coming here, all right? Okay?

**SONNY:** [as Moretti approaches him] Where you goin'? 
MORETTI: I'm right here, I'm right here, all right? I thought we were gonna talk.
SONNY: I thought so too but we're not talkin'. We're tryin' to get through the back door, that's what we're doin'.
MORETTI: I'm talking now. We reached your wife, she'll be here in about a half hour. Okay? Okay?
SONNY: [referring to nearby cops] What are they doin'? They're still pointin'! They love to point!
MORETTI: [to the cops] Holster that weapon! Holster it! Holster that weapon! You too! [to Sonny] All right, come on. What else do you want me to do? Huh? I don't know how you can do any better, huh? We got everything you wanted, everything. I'll do everything I can to stop anything I can, all right? Anything else?

Sonny then asks for food, something to drink (Cokes, no beer, Moretti insists), and aspirin, all of which Moretti gives him. Like an estranged father and son, Sonny and Moretti start by shouting and hurling accusations at each other. But then Moretti confesses his mistake (“our communication isn’t set up yet”), tries to give Sonny what he needs (Sonny’s wife, the bus and jet for passage out of the country, the food, the aspirin), even tries to offer himself to Sonny (“I’m right here, I’m right here. . . . I thought we were gonna talk”). But Sonny knows that Moretti’s kindness is at least partially a ploy—his words sound soothing, but his intention, as Sonny points out in an earlier exchange, is to “bury” him.

And in a later scene, Sonny’s mother (played by Judith Malina) encourages him to come out with her (“What would be the matter if you came out with me?” she asks; “Because I’m not coming out with you, Mom, please,” Sonny answers, as if the answer should have been obvious). She claims that “the FBI understands everything. They understand that it is not you that is doing this, it’s the pressure—it’s from your—from your home life . . . .” And she assures him, “I talked to the man from the FBI and he says—he says if you come out now everything’s gonna be alright. . . . Listen, I’m trying to get you out of this! I told them how you were in the war in Vietnam, I told them you always had good jobs, I told them you were with Goldwater in ’64 and the convention . . . .” But she can’t resist criticizing him: “Everything in your life is sweetness and roses, and you—you wouldn’t need Leon if Angie was treating you right, you know that. I don’t understand—I don’t understand why you want to sleep with her anyway—you got two kids on welfare now—what do you want to sleep with her [for]? [shouting] You got a wife and two kids on welfare!” In a final attempt to get him to come out on her terms, she urges him to run:
SONNY: Run? Where am I gonna run, Ma? I can't run.
SONNY’S MOTHER: Well, don't—maybe—maybe—
SONNY: There's no maybes. No maybes, Ma. Please, you gotta go home now. Where's Pop? Did he come—he didn't come down here, did he?
SONNY’S MOTHER: Oh, is he pissed off at you! He says—he says he doesn't have a son. He says you're dead. You know what he says—
SONNY: He’s right, Ma.
SONNY’S MOTHER: No!—no—no—
SONNY: Look, Ma, I’m a fuckup and I’m an outcast and that’s it. You come near me, you're gonna get it. You're gonna get fucked over and fucked out. Now I gotta go, Ma, please. [shouts to the cops] Get her home, okay? Just take her home!
SONNY’S MOTHER: [as she is led away] How beautiful—how beautiful you were when you were a baby . . .

Sonny’s mother’s love for him, laced as it is with anger and bewilderment over his sexuality, makes her an unwise counselor. If he came out according to her plan, he would only fall into the hands of men, like Sheldon, who want to kill him (Sonny tells him, “I hope the guy that kills me does it ’cause he hates my guts, not because it’s his job”) or who, like his father, already pronounce him dead.

When Sonny displays himself outside the bank on his own terms, however, the crowd adores him, chanting “More! More! More!” They tease him about his sexuality (when he frisks Sheldon before admitting him inside the bank so that he, Sheldon, can make sure the hostages are unharmed, someone calls out, “Pussycat!”), but their whistles and applause suggest, at least, that they don’t hate him because of his sexuality. And, perhaps most important of all, they don’t greet his sexuality with polite, stone-cold silence. That was a revelation to me when I first saw Dog Day Afternoon. When Sonny comes out to pay the pizza delivery boy, he has enough extra cash (fistfuls of it from the bank—never mind that it’s counterfeit) to throw into the crowd, making them beg for more. The pizza boy shouts, “I’m a fucking star!” once he has delivered the food and enjoyed his minute of fame in front of the TV cameras, but clearly it’s Sonny who has star quality.

“When I’m being fucked, I like to get kissed alot,” Sonny tosses off when Moretti assures him that he won’t have to serve more than a year in prison if he surrenders now. Sonny knows it’s a lie. But now that he’s out and in command of the sidewalk, he can say everything!

Late in the film, Sonny speaks with his male lover, Leon (played by Chris Sarandon). At Sonny’s request, Sergeant Moretti escorts Leon from the psychiatric hospital, where he has been recovering from his recent sui-
cide attempt, to the scene of the crime in order to persuade Sonny to give himself up to the police. At first, Leon refuses to speak to Sonny. But then he relents, speaking by telephone from a barbershop across the street as Sergeant Moretti and others secretly tap into the phone line. Sonny's and Leon's long conversation ranges over several different topics—Leon's unstable psychiatric condition, his fears of being implicated in the robbery, Sonny's unpredictably violent temper, Sonny's near-to-nervous breakdown over the unexpected turn of events, and both Sonny's and Leon's melancholy uncertainty about what the future holds in store for them. Here for the first time in my life I was seeing two gay men (or more accurately—though these nuances didn't impress me at the time—one bisexual man and one gay man who wishes to become a straight woman) speaking intimately, honestly, and at length with one another on screen:

SONNY: Hello. Hello? Hello, Leon?
LEON: Hello. Hello, Sonny.
SONNY: What happened? How ya'—how ya' doing?
LEON: Well I'm out of the hospital.
SONNY: Yeah, I know. You know I thought you'd never get out.
LEON: I never thought I'd get out this way, I'll tell you.
SONNY: Yeah. So, how you doin'?
LEON: Uh—I'm a little shaky.
SONNY: Oh yeah? Yeah, well, Moretti told me, you know, that you were all drugged up, so, uh, I figured that's why you didn't talk to me, you know, 'cause I was wondering why you didn't talk to me.
LEON: Yeah. It's really terrible, you know. I mean you walk in and right away they say you're crazy and then they start sticking things in your arm. I mean how do they expect you to get uncrazy if you're asleep all the time? I'm—I'm—uh—just starting to come out of it now.
SONNY: So.
LEON: Well, so, uh, how are you?
SONNY: How? I'm fine. It's something, huh?
LEON: Yeah. Yeah.
SONNY: [starts to cry] I don't know, Leon, you know I'm dyin' here. I'm dyin'.
LEON: Don't you ever listen to yourself when you say that? You're dyin'. Did you ever listen to yourself?
SONNY: What are you talkin' about?
LEON: What do you mean, what am I talkin' about? You are dyin'. You know that you say that to me every day of your life?
SONNY: Oh—
LEON: "I'm dyin'." Well, you're not dyin'. You're killin' the people around you's what you're doin'.
SONNY: Oh come on, Leon, don't give me that shit. I don't need that deep shit now.
LEON: Well I don't think you realize what it means, Sonny. You know, do you realize the things you do?
LEON: You stick a gun to somebody's head.
SONNY: Yeah, well I don't know what I'm doin' sometimes with that.
LEON: Yeah, well obviously you don't. "Go to sleep, Leon, so it won't hurt when I pull the trigger." What do you think I've been doin' in the hospital? I mean I take a handful of pills to get away from you, right?
SONNY: Yeah?
LEON: So, now I'm talkin' to you on the phone again, right? I got no job, I don't have friends, I can't live. I have to live with people. This death business. I'm sorry.
SONNY: I don't know, Leon, you know, I don't know what I'm gettin' here with that shit. You know, what am I supposed to say to that shit? You know, this is goin' on and you're givin' me that shit.
LEON: I'm sorry.
SONNY: You know what's happenin' with me. You know that. You know the pressures I've been havin', right? I mean I got all these pressures and you know about it. You're in that hospital there with all them tubes comin' out. You want that fuckin' operation. You're givin' me that shit, right? Everybody's givin' me shit. Everybody needs money, you know what I mean? So, you needed money, I got you money. That's it.
LEON: Yeah, well I didn't ask you to go and rob a bank!
SONNY: I know you didn't ask me! I know you didn't ask me! Look. I'm not puttin' this on anybody. You know? Nothin' on nobody. I did this on my own, you see? All on my own I did it. But I want you to know something. I want you to know that I'm gonna—I'm gettin' out of here. I'm gettin' a plane out of here, and I just wanted you to know it, that's all. And I wanted you to come down, [his voice trembles] and, uh, I wanted to say just good-bye to you, or, if you wanted to you can come with me. I mean you're free to do what you want. That's what I want—that's just what I wanted to say to you. That's all.
LEON: Uh, I'm free to do what I want, huh?
SONNY: Right.
LEON: Yeah, well, uh, I've been tryin' to get away from you for six months and I'm gonna go away with you on a plane trip, huh? Well, where? Where are you goin'?
SONNY: I don't know where yet. Well, we said Algeria, I don't know. So, I'll go to Algeria, I don't know.
LEON: Why are you goin' to Algeria?
SONNY: I don't know why. They got a Howard Johnson's there, so I'm goin', you know what I mean?
LEON: Howard Johnson's. You're warped, do you know that? You're really warped.
SONNY: I'm warped, I know I'm warped.
LEON: God, Algeria. It's—uh—they walk around—they got masks on—they got things on their heads—they're a bunch of crazy people there.
SONNY: So, what am I supposed to do?
LEON: Well, I don't know. You could have picked a better place.
SONNY: Like what? Sweden? Denmark?
LEON: Yeah. Yeah. Like that, yeah.
LEON: Oh, Jesus.
SONNY: I had to tell him it's not a country. He don't know where Wyoming is. See, I'm with a guy who don't know where Wyoming is, you think you got problems?
LEON: Whew! So, Sal is with you, huh? Oh, boy. You'd be better off givin' up.
SONNY: Well I'm not gonna give up, because what have I done this so far? You know what I mean? I've gone so far with this. Why should I give up now? I can't give up.
LEON: Well, would you do me a favor, then?
SONNY: Yeah, what?
LEON: Well these guys that have me down here, you know, they think I'm—uh—they think I'm part of it—you know, they think I'm part of the plot to rob the bank—
SONNY: Oh that's crazy, Leon. That's crazy. They're just—they're bullshit-tin' you—they're givin' you a snow job.
LEON: Well, no, they told me I was an accessory.
SONNY: No. That's just a con job on you, Leon, don't listen to them.
LEON: Well I have to listen to it.
SONNY: No!
LEON: Well I can't survive in prison, Sonny.
SONNY: Oh, Leon, you're not going to prison, nobody's gonna—
LEON: Well how do you know?
SONNY: Because I know, you're not going to prison. Believe me.
LEON: Well please—
SONNY: Please what? What? What do you want me to do?
LEON: Just tell them—
SONNY: Tell them what? That you didn't do it? Now where am I gonna—where—are they on the phone now? Are they on the phone now?
LEON: Yeah.
SONNY: That's terrific. You talk to me with them on the phone, that's really smart.
LEON: Well I don't have a choice.
SONNY: What do you mean you didn't have a choice?
LEON: Well they're standin' all around me. There's seven thousand fuckin' cops all around me.
SONNY: Who's on the phone now?
LEON: Look, don't lay it on me.
sonny: I'm not layin' it on you, but you knew that was goin' on. What are you talkin' about, layin' it on you—you knew what was happening, right?
leon: Yeah. Yeah.
sonny: Who's on the—I wanna—who's on the phone now? Moretti—Moretti—is that you on the phone? Hello! Will somebody talk to me? Is somebody gonna talk to me, or what? They on the phone now?
leon: They won't talk to you.
sonny: All right, he didn't do it. Okay? He had nothin' to do with it. All right? Now will you get the fuck off the phone? Are they off the phone?
leon: They won't talk to you.
[Unbeknownst to Sonny, Moretti and the others remain on the line.]
sonny: All right, Leon, that was terrific. That really convinced 'em. That's what they wanted to know, right? Did I do it for you or what?
leon: Yeah, thank you.
sonny: Okay. So now what? What are you gonna do?
leon: Well I thought, uh, I thought that I would go back to the hospital, you know. They're really nice there, I mean they really seem like they're tryin' to help me.
sonny: So then that's good, then, right? You found something.
leon: Yeah, well, I don't know if I have or not.
sonny: So are you gonna still have the operation?
leon: Yeah. Yeah.
sonny: So then, what do I s'posed—what am I supposed to say to you?
leon: Thanks a lot. And, uh, bon voyage.
sonny: Yeah, right. And, uh, bon voyage.
leon: Yeah. I'll see you in my dreams, huh?
sonny: Right. I'll write a song. Oh, I don't know, you know? Life's so funny.
leon: You said a mouthful, sweetheart. Well, good-bye, huh?
sonny: Bye.

Leon was the type of person—cowardly, self-centered, effeminate, deceitful, a woman trapped in a man's body—whom I had always been taught to hate. But Sonny doesn't hate Leon. His voice is plaintive, almost kittenish, when he asks Leon, two times over, why Leon didn't talk to him at first. I was amazed that, in spite of all of Sonny's masculine bravado (displayed everywhere else in the film), he could still need somebody like Leon. Sonny even forgives Leon when he discovers that they are being listened to by the police and that Leon knew it all along. His anger is not finally damning of Leon but is only one expression of a much larger, more complex emotional entanglement. In fact, Sonny loves Leon so much that he is even willing to accept Leon's desire to become a woman; that was the kind of self-sacrificial love that I had been
taught in all my years of Catholic schooling to value above every other kind of love on this earth.

Sonny and Leon's conversation is intimate like no conversation I had ever had with any of the men in my life. My father hated it when I would "hang" on the telephone, which I did more and more the older I got, plus my friends were mostly girlfriends, so that just confirmed his sense (or so I imagined) that phone conversations were somehow intrinsically effeminating. His motto was, "state your business and get off." But except for the favor Leon asks of Sonny (that Sonny assure the cops that Leon had nothing to do with the bank robbery), they speak purely for the sake of being with each other. And their conversation doesn't risk ending just because it takes a turn or because its "business" is taken care of; when a moment of silence falls, Sonny isn't embarrassed by the consequent potential for intimacy, but says, rather, just "so." And Leon, too, embraces that intimacy: "Well, so, uh, how are you?" What I heard exchanged between the men in this scene, besides words, were patience, silences, and sighs.

Perhaps most affirming of all, Sonny and Leon share their deepest, most existential concerns with one another: Sonny: "Oh, I don't know, you know? Life's so funny." Leon: "You said a mouthful, sweetheart." Or again, Leon: "I'll see you in my dreams, huh?" And Sonny: "Right. I'll write a song."

And I loved the way Leon called Sonny "sweetheart."

In *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood argues that "keeping Sonny and Leon apart," in separate buildings, interacting only on the telephone, "spares the spectator the potential embarrassment of imagining anything they might do in bed together. It is also consistent with the film's general desexualization of Sonny" (235). But whatever the intention of the filmmakers, the film's dilation on the inner and interpersonal lives of gay men rather than on their specifically sexual attraction to each other nevertheless had the power to push me, an isolated, unworldly gay teenager, toward accepting the idea of a male homosexual relationship in a brand new way. What I didn't need at that time was the image of two gay men as sexual beings (although I did find Al Pacino staggeringly attractive); instead, I needed to know that being gay meant something besides sexuality. I already understood, reluctantly, that being gay had chosen me: ever since eighth grade, I knew how turned on I was by other boys' bodies. I would periodically think, I'm gay, and then I'd shudder at the thought and try to put it out of my mind (the thought would always come back). But I was starved for an understanding of all
the ways that I would have to choose to be gay in order to survive and to grow. I must have dimly sensed that Sonny's physical separation from Leon meant not a desexualization of Sonny but, rather, the allegorized, indeed politicized, truth about gay people as I experienced it daily: they were inherently "cut off" from each other, forbidden movement, forbidden to look at each other, imprisoned, "dying here" as Sonny tells Leon on the verge of tears.

In The Celluloid Closet, Vito Russo, like Robin Wood distrustful of the portrayal of gay men in Dog Day Afternoon, argues—too hastily I think—that when "Sonny's straight accomplice Sal complains that the television news reports are calling him a homosexual, Sonny says, 'Ahh, Sal, what do you care? It's only a freak show to them.' And that was all the movie was to middle-America, a freaky, only-in-New York story that made a fair two-hour yarn but failed to touch their lives" (231). My experience of the film, and I don't doubt plenty of other people's, belies Russo's claim. This doesn't mean that Dog Day Afternoon represents gay people well or fairly, but it does mean that an audience's response to a film is to some degree incalculable, and so any gay-affirmative intervention in the filmmaking process needs to take into account the full complexity of the scene of response. Perhaps if critics and filmmakers acknowledge how unpredictable an audience's deepest response may be, then the quality and complexity of gay representation will change.

III

In case he should be killed while trying to escape the police, Sonny writes his last will and testament near the end of the film; by this time I had fallen in love with him. The lights and the air conditioning inside the bank have been cut off, it is nighttime, and Sonny feels exhausted and alone. He has already said good-bye to Leon. His undershirt is soaked with sweat. The deep lines in his otherwise youthful face bespeak suffering, corruption, even some inarticulate familiarity with evil. His will begins, "To my darling wife Leon, whom I love more than any man has loved another man in all eternity"; I had never heard a man speak such tender feelings for another man before. "In all eternity": that was the kind of thing Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote love songs about ("You're his girl and he's your feller") but it was always about a man and a woman. That night as I lay awake in my bed, unable to fall asleep, I kept picturing Al Pacino, in his white dress shirt, unbuttoned all the way down, his white undershirt damp with sweat, his face and hair glistening with sweat, telling me how much he loved me. Deep feelings and tender words of love and affection and kindness and gentleness poured out
of him like sweat: Patrick, I love you, I love you so much, I love you as a man has never loved another man, I love you as a man loves another man, I love you for all eternity... and I began to realize what my next film project would be.

The film I imagined was called *Brothers*, and it starred Al Pacino and me—I graciously took second billing. I started by imagining the sex scenes that *Dog Day Afternoon* never shows, scenes with Al and me in bed, making love. I worked out a scenario in which a verbal argument would turn into a physical fight—pushing, punches, throwing things, trashing the apartment (I would have to figure out exactly whose apartment it was, and what we were doing there together in the first place, and what we were fighting about, but that could come later). At some point the fight would suddenly calm down, and turn into a love scene.

I was younger and weaker than Al, of course, and had always gone out of my way to avoid fights with other boys, but I could be slightly tougher on film than I was in real life. So Al Pacino and I would be fighting and he would be throwing knickknacks at me and I would be throwing pillows and other bed linens back at him, and he would chase me around the room, trying to grab me in order to throw me down (both of us would be in our underwear, because it was getting close to bedtime when the argument began, and it was summertime, so it was hot, and this was a run-down apartment building in New York, so Sonny doesn’t have any air conditioning), and for a while I would manage to escape him, but not without doing terrible damage to the apartment: blinds would become twisted, curtains pulled down from the windows, pictures would fall down off the walls, the glass smashing as they hit the floor. The whole room, it seemed, would shake, as if there were an earthquake, as if in a disaster film! Finally, he would catch me roughly and tightly squeeze me in his strong arms and pin me onto the bed, face down, the way wrestlers hold each other to the mat, their bodies tense and beading with sweat, their faces anguished, their muscles and veins tightening visibly beneath their skin. And he would force me to submit, as I fought, but failed, to get out from underneath him. “Let me go! Let me go!” I would shout, but somehow this was not really what either of us wanted. (In *Men’s Dreams, Men’s Healing* [1990], the Jungian psychotherapist Robert H. Hopcke quotes one of his patients as follows: “The dream starts a split second before a film-review program I am watching cuts to a clip of a film it has reviewed. In Italian, I see and hear Al Pacino, who is a boxer named Maccagnorola, denigrating another boxer, who is named [humorously] Grancche. There is a crowd in a kitchen which leaves, ready to sit down at the table to eat an Italian meal in the dining room. Al Pacino and his wife are getting things ready, bringing plates
of food out. I am waiting to hear him begin using words like 'barbaric' and 'animal' with regard to the other boxer, but he doesn't. Instead he fusses, making sure everyone is seated and all is ready' [139].)

So Al would bury his face in my neck, but rather than lift it again, he would linger there, for he had begun to kiss the back of my neck, his disheveled hair covering his face and the back of my neck. He would slowly, slowly relax his muscles and loosen his grip on me (his arms had locked themselves around me) and begin slowly, gently to shift his legs in order to feel his skin rubbing against mine and reach down with one arm and begin to caress the inside of my thigh. I too had begun to relax, and lay there, now on my back, lifeless beneath him, and looked up into his face as if to ask, confused, worried, afraid, in disbelief, but also expectant, full of desire, "What is happening to us?" (Again, Hopcke's patient: "Now I am in the movie, sitting on the kitchen counter, as if my eyes are the camera [you can't see me in the film, but I see everything] and I'm a little kid, eight or nine years old. I ask Dad [Al Pacino] for a piece of bread. He comes very close to me, his chest pressed up against the counter between my legs, so I can feel and smell his body very close. He dips a small piece of bread in olive oil with long thin tongs and gives it to me in the mouth. I barely chew this before I ask for another, which he gives to me in the same manner. I keep asking, expecting him to refuse, hurriedly chewing each morsel so he can't—but even with my mouth full, he continues to feed me. He is extraordinarily tender and generous. I feel very loved." [139]) (Fig. 23.)

Now Al Pacino was flat on top of me, and was kissing me, and calling me sweetheart, darling, and telling me that he was sorry, that he didn't want to hurt me, asking me did he hurt me, kissing the hurts here and there to make them go away, kissing my face and telling me that he loved me and had wanted this moment for a long, long time and that he loved me and would love me for all eternity. . . .

Eventually I worked out a plot to go along with the sex scenes. The film, I decided, is about a boy, around sixteen years old, named David. (Actually, I now forget exactly what my character's name was. I think I usually named my characters "Peter," but that would be odd if true, because "Peter" was the name of the boy who in tenth grade made my life miserable by throwing little wads of chewing gum in my hair during social studies class. He also punched me in front of the boys' bathroom one afternoon before lunch. I said and did nothing. For a long time, the name "Peter" meant the unbearable pain in my groin and the feeling of gum in my hair, and the anger that everyone else in the class could see what was being done to me but didn't try to stop it and the agony of knowing that after class I would rush with tears in my eyes to the boys'
bathroom to pull out my hair stuck with gum and Peter would follow me and just stand there and watch me and the whole ritual would be repeated the next day and the next. So I'm not sure whether now I felt that I could defuse the name "Peter" of its power over me by adopting it as my own in the film or whether, probably more likely, it was the one name I knew that I could never, ever own. I think my name in the film must have ended up being one that I happened to have no particular relation to at the time, like "David.")

Either he has run away from home or he is suddenly orphaned—at any rate, the film begins with David leaving the suburbs and going to New York City to live with his cousin Sonny (played by Al Pacino). At first, David doesn't like Sonny all that much and doesn't like living with him. David is used to suburban comforts (like the home I grew up in) and has a tough time adjusting to urban noise, pollution, squalor, neighbors dropping in at all hours of the night, drinking, drugs, sex, and so on and so on. Sonny doesn't like David much either because he doesn't like having to be a parent, he's used to living his life sloppily the way he wants, and David is very finicky and spoiled (the way my siblings
always complained that I was spoiled because I was the “baby” of the family and as a result, they thought, got everything I wanted). David and Sonny have a few nasty fights, but little by little they fall into a homosexual relationship with each other. I’m not sure, but I think it’s clear to David from the start that Sonny is gay, although the film makes little, if anything, of Sonny’s gayness until the scenes where he and David start making love with each other. I must have learned this narrative device from *Dog Day Afternoon*, as it isn’t until late in the film that we learn that the antihero with whom we are compelled to identify, Sonny, is also a gay man. For certain, David has never had any homosexual experiences until now, and he spends a good deal of the film worrying that he might be gay and not wanting to admit the way he feels about Sonny. Sonny, on the other hand, is sure that he loves David and has no doubts about entering into a love relationship with him. One night, they try sleeping separately at David’s request, but before you know it David is at Sonny’s bedside wanting to come in again, and he does and they’re back where they started, unable to resist their love for each other.

So things go on like this for a while until an aunt and uncle in the family, played by Estelle Parsons and Karl Malden, decide that they want to adopt David. Reluctantly, and much to Sonny’s chagrin, David goes back to the suburbs to live with his aunt and uncle for a “trial run.” This part of the film is blurry in my memory because it was ill-conceived from the start, but I know that there were scenes meant to show how awful life with David’s aunt and uncle would be if they adopted him, despite the fact (which is supposed to make David happy, but doesn’t) that they have nine children and hence, nine live-in playmates for David. In one scene, David is playing pool with a few of his cousins, but it is totally boring. In another scene, David’s aunt scolds him for no apparent reason at the dinner table, and here he is supposed to be her guest, and she scolds him! (This family was modeled largely on my father’s twin brother’s family of nine kids, whom I hated visiting—they did have a nice in-the-ground swimming pool in their backyard, though, and instead of a regular kitchen table and chairs they had a really neat built-in table with one continuous vinyl sofa running all around it like a big booth in a restaurant, but that was about it. Their house was like a circus with millions of people always running around; finding privacy and peace and quiet in my house with my five siblings was hard enough, but finding it in their house I knew would be virtually impossible.) Desperate, David secretly arranges for Sonny to come and steal him back, which Sonny does.

The remainder of the film, inspired in part by *Kramer vs. Kramer*, which had come out the same year I saw *Dog Day Afternoon* on TV, involves a complicated court battle for custody of David between Sonny and the
aunt and uncle. In the end, Sonny wins custody, although here again I'm not sure how, and anyway I also imagined a peak dramatic moment (which completely contradicts the idea of Sonny winning the case) where David would have to choose whom he would prefer to spend the rest of his life with, and shockingly he chooses Sonny over his aunt and uncle.

The very last scene in the film shows a bittersweet embrace between David and Sonny in some tiny room that, I imagined, could be found in courthouses for keeping witnesses or for sending defendants while they await the verdict or maybe where they send the jury to decide the verdict or maybe where the judge (played in my film by Sir Lawrence Olivier) goes to decide the verdict. I didn't quite know if there was even going to be a jury making the decision or just the judge. In fact, I imagined very little about the courtroom scenes, not because I didn't suspect they would be crucial to the working out of the plot, but because I usually hated courtroom dramas, I always got bored watching them, and I never understood exactly what was going on in them anyway. The important thing was the reunion scene between Sonny and David after Sonny wins the case, or the scene where David makes his choice and ends up in Sonny's arms.

About a year after these initial fantasies came to me, I made one other scene for Brothers that actually contradicts the plot in a serious way; the scene never quite found a secure place within the film, but I nevertheless felt compelled to make it with care. In this scene, it is Al Pacino/Sonny, not I/David, who is shown to be extremely uneasy about his homosexuality. Sonny is restless one night and decides to sneak out and go to a gay bar. Obviously I was confused: if Sonny were openly and comfortably gay, as I had otherwise imagined him to be, why would he be "sneaking" out to gay bars? I think my only conception of gay bars and the people who went to them came from seeing brief clips from the movie Cruising on the nightly news when, upon its release in 1980, members of the gay community protested it for suggesting that there was some inherent connection between, on the one hand, gay identity and, on the other, sadomasochism and murder. Newscasters would show gay activists picketing outside a movie theater where Cruising was playing, cut to the line of people waiting to buy tickets, cut to a five-second segment of one of the apparently objectionable scenes in the film—usually a scene in the leather bar where the hero, Steve Burns (played by Al Pacino), goes to track down a serial killer. All you saw in the clip were ill-arranged masses of oddly dressed or shirtless men dancing in the dark and grabbing onto each other and huddled together in groups of three or more doing it was hard to tell exactly what.
So I decided that in *Brothers*, Sonny would go off to one of these mysterious places, just to see if he really is or if he really wants to be gay, or is it just that he loves David and that this is not otherwise the life for him? To make a long story short, he goes in, has a beer, someone starts feeling him up, he goes along with it for a little while, but then two other guys join in, he gets nervous, blows up, throws his drink in their faces, and storms out of the bar. We see him charging down the alley behind the bar, enraged but also shaking with fear. In his bewilderment, he kicks over a garbage can and its contents spill out into the filthy twilight—and the scene fades.

I wanted *Brothers* to have a depressing, somewhat sleazy look and feel to it. I imagined Sonny’s New York apartment building to be a grim, walk-up affair with a creaking staircase and sinister-looking tenants. I thought it would be good to have me/David accidentally enter the wrong apartment in my quest to find Sonny’s door at the beginning of the film. I would be walking down a dark, ugly, narrow brown hallway and pass by an open door. Inside would be a group of people, very rough and unattractive-looking with their undershirts and beer bottles and fat bellies, men and women, assembled underneath a swinging lamp or maybe just a light bulb, around a table, playing poker (this image seems to have been inspired by the poker-playing scenes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which I may have seen on TV around this time). I would walk in and they would tell me scornfully that I got the wrong apartment.

I would say innocently, “where does Sonny live? I’m his cousin, David.”

“Oh, Sonny?” they would all chant in chorus, and cackle as if they knew something I didn’t. “He lives upstairs in 6H—” (I just picked any number) “—last door on the left. All the way at the end of the hall, you can’t miss it—heh, heh, heh!” One of the fat men would chuckle and nudge his partner and point his thumb at me and chew on his cigar, as I humbly turned around and continued on my way, mounting the seemingly interminable stairs with a suitcase in each hand (not unlike Maria when she journeys out of the convent to meet the von Trapp family).

During the opening credits, though my memory of this is weak, we would see a succession of desolate New York City street and rooftop scenes—garage doors; trash cans; dark and empty alleyways (at the time, I didn’t know that New York City doesn’t really *have* many alleyways, at least not the kind you can freely enter and walk through like we had in Reading); streets with lots of parked cars but otherwise deserted, except for maybe a stray cat, a stray *black* cat; empty front stoops; chimneys smoking, or maybe chimneys not smoking—just acres and acres of crooked chimneys and TV antennas and water towers like sculpture on
the rooftops of New York in the moonlight (there was a shot like this in *Mary Poppins*); clotheslines draped between buildings with only a few tattered pieces of clothing drooping on them. For some reason, emptiness and squalor (somewhat contradictory imagery) were the key notes struck in this sequence.

I wanted the opening titles done in small, unobtrusive, white lettering, like the credits for *Dog Day Afternoon*, because this was more of an intellectual film than any I had made so far. For a while I even considered having all the words begin with lowercase letters, like "starring Al Pacino... Patrick Horrigan," and so on, the idea being that this movie wasn't going to give you what you expected or necessarily even wanted, it's not going to give you anything, it's going to take something away from you, you're going to come out of the movie feeling slightly dirty and offended and wasted, and I thought that somehow lowercase letters would convey that sense of disobedience, entropy, and devolution right from the start—except that I also planned on giving the film a happy ending, so then people wouldn't come out of the movie feeling like they'd just been through a war. I guess I wanted it both ways. Or maybe I didn't know what I wanted.

The ad campaign for *Brothers* was as interesting to me as anything within the film itself. I decided the trailer should be very foreboding, almost as if *Brothers* were a horror film (along these same lines, I even considered for a while having William Friedkin direct it—after all, he had directed *The Exorcist*, not to mention *Cruising*). The unifying motif for all promotion of the film was an electrocardiographic display, a black screen upon which a green point of light traces the rhythms of a heartbeat. The logo for the film was the word BROTHERS superimposed on an electrocardiogram (EKG) with the O unnaturally distended because it coincides spatially with an aberrant portion of the EKG, whose unusually high peaks and deep valleys have been caused by an irregular, or an especially strong, heartbeat. The word BROTHERS may even have been written by the bright green point of light, using perhaps highly sophisticated animation techniques.

My *Brothers* logo was inspired in part by the logo used for the film *Network*, where the W in the word NETWORK was actually half the letter W and half a bolt of lightening, to suggest both the current of electricity that produces TV images, but also, I suppose, the wrath of God that will strike dead our corrupt society for showing—as my parents would often say—such crap on TV night after night. It was also inspired by the logo for *The Poseidon Adventure*, a silhouette of an upside down, half-submerged ship, inside of which the words of the title are printed, with the word ADVENTURE all squiggley and distorted, as if seen under-
water (fig. 14, in chapter 3). So when I made the O in BROTHERS misshapen, as if from a skipped or a pounding heartbeat, I wanted to achieve that same effect of normality gone haywire, of hell upside down. I also thought the logo would be appropriate not just because the film was about homosexuality (and because the idea of a heart stopping or beating fast at the thought of homosexuality seemed to make perfect sense), but because the film was about a homosexual relationship that vibrated ambiguously between a familial bond and an exogamous one, and also because, to the extent that it was a familial bond (Sonny and David are first cousins) it suggested incest, which in turn suggested malformed children who would have to live life with a severe disability or a hideous limb or who would, perhaps, die prematurely (hence the erratic heartbeat).

Because this was so obviously an "adult" film, it could never be discussed candidly, say, in the Sunday Arts and Leisure section of the New York Times or on prime time TV. Instead, I imagined a late-night TV interview with Dick Cavett in which Al Pacino and I would talk about the film and Dick would ask all of the really juicy questions. Although I never watched Dick Cavett's late night interview show, I had one other model in mind. In December of 1976, Barbara Walters interviewed Barbra Streisand and her then live-in boyfriend, the notorious Hollywood hairdresser-turned-film producer, Jon Peters. During the interview, Walters showed a clip from their soon-to-be-released remake of A Star Is Born, in which Esther Hoffman (Barbra) and John Norman Howard (Kris Kristofferson) rehearse Esther's new song, "Evergreen," in a recording studio ("Love, soft as an easy chair . . .").

I watched the interview show with my parents, and I was pricked by the disparity between our reactions. Whereas I was squealing inside with delight at seeing Barbra Streisand up close and personal, and at catching a glimpse of her new film, my parents were visibly unmoved. They didn't approve of couples living together out of wedlock, and they worried, with good reason, what effect Streisand's domestic partnership with Peters might have on me, since I was such a devoted and impressionable Streisand fan. I was mildly shocked when Barbra and Jon brushed aside Walters' question about whether their living together set a good example for their children (whom they'd each had from previous marriages): Jon's unruffled response was that it's how you treat each other that matters, not whether you're married; and Barbra said that marriage would come eventually (it never did). Plus, my parents probably couldn't have been much impressed with this remake of A Star Is Born, especially
since Judy Garland and James Mason had done it, they always thought,
so handsomely in 1954.

I, on the other hand, thought Barbra looked gorgeous, she sounded
better than ever, and I loved the way the camera panned around her
while she sang "Evergreen," almost as if she were an object of sacred ven-
eration. And yet, I too was a little disappointed with what I saw. To begin
with, I wished Kristofferson were just out of the picture altogether. And
I didn’t like all of the “realistic” touches—Streisand’s impromptu laugh-
ter before the line “and their dance is unrehearsed” and the way she
“worriedly” touches her throat near the end of the song as if to suggest
that she must work to achieve her perfect tone quality! The fact that she
sang live here on camera, rather than lip-synching as in her earlier film
musicals, didn’t please me at all. Her magnetism was always real to me
no matter through what special effects it was achieved. In fact, I suspect
that the more artificially constructed the effects of her performance, the
more they intoxicated me, because they proved (as the promotional slo-
gan for her 1983 film, Yentl, would have it) that “nothing’s impossible!”
I wanted Hollywood musicals to be honest about what they were (a fan-
tasy), but it seemed to me that by having the story take place in the
contemporary, vulgate world of pop music, this version of A Star Is Born
was covering up for the fact that it was still a Hollywood musical, so that
if the characters should ever break out into song, as in this scene, there
would always be an alibi: of course they’re singing, not because that’s
what their wildest fantasies and deepest urges tell them they must do
(as mine would if my life were a musical) but because after all they’re
pop singers and that’s what pop singers do in real life—they sing. I still
wanted Barbra to make another big-budget show biz musical like Hello,
Dolly! where any stroll down Fourteenth Street turned like a miracle into
a production number with hundreds of extras singing and dancing and
tons of scenery and a full-scale orchestra filling the blue sky. Obviously
those happy days were gone forever.

I was also disappointed in Barbra’s choice of Jon Peters as a boyfriend
(a slimy hairdresser?!?) in the same way that I always hated the guys my
sisters used to date. Plus I was having a hard time adjusting to Barbra’s
new frizzy hairdo, which Jon apparently talked her into getting.

However, disappointment and moral outrage were precisely the feel-
ings I wanted people to have about me in my film Brothers and in the
late night Dick Cavett interview with me and Al Pacino (actually, I never
really worried about anybody’s reaction to Al Pacino either in the film
or in the interview—in fact, I could barely think of anything for Al to do
or say during the interview). I wanted people to think, Patrick’s not the
boy I used to know. And it wasn’t long after seeing the Barbara Walters interview that I began to think that the whole purpose of that interview, in a way, was to disappoint people, to disappoint Barbra Streisand’s fans, to show the world what a brand-new, liberated, grown-up person Barbra could become if she wanted to—if she had to—after all this was 1976. I came around to thinking that Jon Peters wasn’t all that bad (in fact, he was kind of cute!), and Barbra would wear her hair any way she liked (fig. 24). I felt that my Dick Cavett interview should send a similar message to the world: that I was grown up now, that I could and would do what I wanted, and that included playing a homosexual character and even suggesting if not saying outright that maybe Al Pacino and I were also having an affair in real life on the side. (At midnight mass one Christmas Eve during the mid-eighties, I got into a fit of uncontrol­lable laughter with my sister Karen over something one of our former high school English teachers, Mrs. Bromfield, was doing in the pew in front of us, I don’t remember what. After mass she turned to me and said, “Patrick, I heard you laughing all throughout mass. I’m surprised at you. Not only do you look different [I was sporting a new perm], but you act different, too. You should be ashamed. I don’t know what’s hap­pened to you!” This, of course, only increased our laughter.)

Whenev er I thought about my interview with Dick Cavett, I always insisted that Al Pacino and I should be wearing black tuxedos for the occasion. Somehow the tuxedos heightened for me the shattering discrep­ancy between my public image (nice, clean cut, obedient, from a good Catholic family) and what I was doing privately (having sex with men on screen, talking openly about it on TV), between my ostensible identity as an “artist” and the homosexual content of my art. But the tuxedos also domesticated and legitimated, in my mind, the frightful power of my sexuality, of my character’s homosexuality. I had also seen a picture of Barbra, Jon Peters, and Kris Kristofferson on a talk show with Geraldo Rivera from around the time of the release of A Star Is Born, and both Kris and Barbra were wearing tuxedos.

Dick Cavett: Hi. It’s good to have you here again.
Patrick Horrigan: Thanks, Dick. It’s good to be back on late night TV.
Dick: How long has it been?
Patrick: Oh, God. Let’s see. I haven’t been here since—I think you had me on just after the ’77 oscars?
Dick: You’ve had probably the most successful acting career of anyone under twenty-one in Hollywood history. You won best actor in 1977, best supporting actor in 1978, and now there’s talk of another best actor nomination for Brothers—both you and Al Pacino, best actor nom­i­nations.
Figure 24. Esther Hoffman Howard (Barbra Streisand) in the 1976 version of *A Star Is Born.*
Patrick: Well, I don't know, I mean sometimes it amazes me to think about that—you know, being fourteen and playing in these really serious films about death and trauma and suicide [laughs]. But—I—you know, I hate the word “superstar”—I hate that word. [pause] I think I missed a lot of the normal things kids grow up with. School has not been a regular part of my life, what with growing up half the time in Pennsylvania, half in Hollywood. I mean I've missed whole years. I have had wonderful private tutors whom I just adore, really, and they've been very good to me. You know, they've been like surrogate parents. Especially my piano teacher, she's—well, I don't know where to begin. But I didn't have a regular childhood, and, you know, I would sort of think, shouldn't I be going to a basketball game or something normal like that, rather than, you know, getting up at five o'clock in the morning to be on the set and ready to shoot by seven or going to parties at producers' houses where everyone else is drinking martinis and I'm having 7-Up. It's funny.

Dick: I'm wondering how you would compare your career with that of other child stars—I'm thinking of Brooke Shields, Ricky Schroder, Jodie Foster, Tatum O'Neal. Do you see any similarities between your career and theirs?

Patrick: Well, yes and no. I mean, I've been very lucky, and I know that. One thing about Hollywood is, for young people, you have to go through an exploitation period when you're starting out—you're either a sexpot or you're “the brat” or “the kid” or you're “precocious”—and the thing about Brooke Shields is, all anybody could talk about when she did *Pretty Baby* was, “Is she wearing a body stocking?!” Whereas I, on the other hand, I feel as though I've been treated like a full human being right from the start, and my first film was a major role, and, okay, I was playing a ten-year-old, but it's a real part and he is a real person, you know? But I don't want to make it sound like I'm knocking Brooke's work, I mean she and I have talked about this, and I know that I'm not saying anything out of school—I mean, she's said the same things about her work to me, so . . .

Dick: So your new film is due to open—when?

Patrick: December something. I guess Christmas day, now. I'm not sure. It keeps getting pushed back. First it was a September opening. Then Thanksgiving. Let's hope sometime before 1990!

Dick: Because—

Patrick: Because of all the changes that are being made to it—every hour on the hour, it seems. This film has been through so many incarnations. I've never worked on a film like this before.

Dick: Can you tell us what it's about?

Patrick: [laughs] I suppose so. Well, I play this—boy, who runs away from home and goes to live with his cousin, who is Al Pacino, I mean who is played by Al Pacino [laughs], and, basically, they fall in love with each other.

Dick: They fall in love with each other?
Patrick: Yeah.

Dick: How do you feel about playing what I take you to mean is a homosexual character?

Patrick: I feel fine, really. And I don't believe all that stuff about how it damages your career and you'll never work again or you'll be forever typecast as a homosexual. I think if the work is good then the work is good and that's all that matters and you'll keep on working, knock on wood. I guess I feel like I'm at a point in my career where I want to take chances. I don't want to make movies about just ordinary people like you always see in the movies. I wanted the chance to play someone who, in many ways, is different from me—someone who is not sympathetic. Also, I mean, who could turn down an offer to work with Al Pacino?! But you know this is not a film [makes quotation mark signs with his fingers] "about homosexuality," it's really about just two people, one of whom happens to be another man, and they fall in love and they discover that they need each other and that's really all it is. The other big reason for doing this picture was that we had almost complete freedom in creating our characters.

Dick: I understand that this film has had, at different times since its inception, sixteen scripts. Sixteen?!

Patrick: [laughs] Yeah. I think, more!

Dick: Why?

Patrick: Well, the original idea for this film was Joan Didion's, oddly enough. She had written a script with her husband, John Gregory Dunne, around the same time that they were collaborating on the script for the Streisand version of A Star Is Born, and then it got tossed around Warner Brothers for about three years until finally Irvin Kershner was signed to direct. There had been some talk of William Friedkin directing it, but that never got beyond the bright idea stage. Now at that time Kershner was still thought of as a kind of semidocumentary director, but he had also directed Barbra Streisand in 1972 in Up the Sandbox, which is about a woman who is trying to decide whether she should have an abortion, so I guess Warner Brothers thought, okay, here is someone who can direct a "problem" picture. They probably thought Brothers was going to be another TV movie of the week about teen pregnancy or something ridiculous like that. I don't know. But anyway, um, all of a sudden it was like there was no script. We were doing scenes and we started improvising a lot, and we began to just write our own dialogue or not even write it, just, you know, it would just come out as we were doing the scene, and then we found that our characters were changing in unpredictable ways—but good ways. I mean the whole courtroom sequence was really up in the air during the whole shooting and Al and I had different ideas, in fact, about how it should go, and we even made two completely different versions of the ending.

Dick: I heard Lawrence Olivier wasn't very happy about that.

Patrick: Yeah. Well, I don't know—I do love Larry. [laughs] But—so any-
way, it had become clear to us that this was a totally different project from the one we started out with. It was very important to me, and really for both me and Al, that this was a film where we were as much responsible for the finished product as anyone else, and Irvin understood that— I don’t think another director would have gone along with that—not like Irvin. He doesn’t have an ego, you know? He’s a total... artist. I can’t think of another word for it.

Dick: You’re not only one of the most respected actors in Hollywood, you’re also one of the busiest. Not to jump too far ahead of ourselves, but what’s next for you?

Patrick: Well I’m really excited because this summer I’m going to have fun. I have a small part in a film called Cancer, which is going to be a big all-star thing, it has a big budget [laughs]—it’s very big and very Hollywood and I love it!—I mean, there’s nothing like working with Marlon Brando and Lucille Ball in the same picture! And I play a young—very young—doctor who knows something about a cure for cancer, which has just been discovered—the cure has just been discovered—and—well I better not say anything more about it, but I get chased around a lot! I have a stunt double in this movie, can you believe it? It’s a thriller, you know? And then after—oh, and Jane Fonda’s in it as well, did I say that already?—anyway—and then after that I’m not sure. There are a few projects that I’m sort of developing on my own, which I don’t think I would know how to even begin to explain at this point. Oh yeah, and I have a small but really juicy part in The Stand—based on the Stephen King novel—but that’s at least a year down the road. But I get to play an absolute villain, and the kid I play is supposed to be fat, so I’m going to have to put on something like, I don’t know, fifty pounds! I don’t even want to think about it. But, you know, if Shelley Winters could do it for The Poseidon Adventure, I can do it for this, that’s my philosophy. The price of character acting! [laughs] For some reason I’m much more comfortable right now with small parts that allow me to do more character acting, and preferably unsavory types—for some reason, please don’t ask me why!

Dick: Why! Why! [laughs]

Patrick: See, I want to stay away from parts that just allow me to “be myself.” I guess I’m looking for a different kind of challenge. Of course, it’s a myth that when you play a character who is very like yourself, you’re really just being yourself—I don’t think that there’s really ever any such thing, for an actor, as just being yourself, you know?

Dick: Let me ask you a more difficult question.

Patrick: Please.

Dick: You and Pacino may very well both be nominated for best actor for this film. How would you deal with that? I mean, you’d want to kill each other, right?

Patrick: [lengthy pause] You know, it’s great to be recognized by your peers and I’m grateful and flattered and honored and all of those things—all of those good things—but I do have to say that it just doesn’t mat-
ter. I mean I would be happy to win and I would be thrilled if Al won and I know that I'm not—I know that he feels the same way—I mean, I don't want to speak for Al, but, uh... I think a lot of people would like to hear things like, oh, you know, there's this rivalry between them, or they really didn't get along when they made this picture and the behind-the-scenes this and that, but, you know, I'm sorry if people are disappointed when I say that nothing could be farther from the truth. I mean, people like to gossip. And we've had so much of it for this film that at this point, they can say anything they want—they've practically said everything already, I think! I just know what this film is really all about and the Oscars and all the press and the lies—the hype—they're not what this film is about for me.

_Dick:_ There's been trouble at Warner Brothers because the film is perceived as being—and I'm quoting the studio head of Warner Brothers—the film is "pornographic, with little artistic—"

_Patrick:_ "—with little artistic merit," yes, I know, I read the article in _Rolling Stone_

_Dick:_ Oh, hey, by the way, that pinup—I mean, the picture of you on the cover of _Rolling Stone_—whew! Hide that one from Grandma and the kids!

_Patrick:_ [laughs] Yeah, you know, at first I said to my agent, are you kidding? Pose in the nude?! But then I said, oh what the hell, and I just did it. It was fun, what can I say? But you know, I see it more as an art photograph than a pinup.

_Dick:_ It's a beauty. But I interrupted you.

_Patrick:_ What were we talking about? Oh yeah—well, anyway, the film is _not_ pornographic. The studio heads have not seen this picture, and they're sabotaging it—well, they're _trying_ to sabotage it before it even has a chance.

_Dick:_ Why?

_Patrick:_ [sigh of frustration] I don't know. For a while it was supposed to have an X rating, which, I mean, it's ridiculous! Can you imagine?! It would kill the movie—but that's not even the point. I mean, this is not a pornographic film! What can you say? People are going to be afraid of what they don't know or what's unfamiliar, but this is not a pornographic film.

_Dick:_ Now I've been told, and I have not seen the entire film—we're going to be showing a clip a little bit later on—

_Patrick:_ [laughs] Which one are you going to show?!

_Dick:_ [laughs along] Don't worry! One of the less steamy scenes. But I'm told that when the two of you have sex in this film that it was... more than acting. There's a moment where you have an orgasm. Now what about that?

_Patrick:_ [laughs] What _about_ it?

_Dick:_ What—I mean—well, let me ask you this. Is it real?

_Patrick:_ Is it real. Is _what_ real?

_Dick:_ The orgasm. Your orgasm in the film. Is it real?
Patrick: [pause] Well—[annoyed] I’m an actor—that this is a film—I mean, “is it real?” I don’t understand what—why can’t anyone talk about this film as a piece of art, which after all, I mean, that’s what it boils down to. I’m an artist, artists create illusions, that’s what they’re paid to do, and I think the question is, how well can they do it, not what is real. Reality, unreality—I honestly don’t understand the question, you know? I mean, it’s not a question that interests me, let’s put it that way. I mean, what does my personal life or what I was feeling when I did the scene—what does any of that have to do with the finished product—with the artifact, with the art, with the art that gets made and sent out there to give pleasure—for—for entertainment purposes alone? Why do people want to know this kind of thing?

Dick: [turns to face the camera] And we’ll be back in just a few minutes.

IV

Recently I turned down my first movie offer. After years of looking down my nose at gay men who work out, thinking they are so worried about how other gay men see them that they sell their souls to the fickle winds of fashion and pump up their bodies, no matter how painful and boring the task may be, I joined the gym a couple of years ago with my then boyfriend Brian as a loving way of making myself better and stronger for him—for us. So I arrived at the gym one day a couple months ago only to discover a film crew busy at work. I wanted to walk on the treadmill, but the film crew were filming in the area where the treadmills were located, and it looked like I might end up being in the film depending on which treadmill I chose. I felt angry that they were invading my gym space. I always hate it when someone on the street, someone I don’t know, takes my picture or films me inadvertently with their video camera. I guess I’m one of those people who believe that when someone takes your picture, they’ve captured your soul, and I want to be the one to decide who gets my soul and who doesn’t. (As many people did at the time, I probably would have reacted with horror in the mid-nineteenth century to the newfangled and godless daguerreotype.) I started walking on my treadmill but was extremely uncomfortable because the floodlights were all around me and I wasn’t sure if they were planning to film me and the people in my vicinity walking on the treadmills or if the lights were there for some other shot that didn’t involve me. I watched the filmmakers at work and felt how arrogant, how uninteresting they were—and they were ruining my workout! Unable to relax, I got off my treadmill and moved to another one in a less conspicuous area (I was also annoyed that the bright lights were making me hotter than I would normally be just working out on the treadmill).
But then I thought, how strange that I should be so uncomfortable in front of the camera, given that all my life I’ve wanted to be a movie star. Maybe I just don’t want my film debut to be a supporting role, I thought; maybe, I thought, I want my debut to be a big splash like Barbra Streisand’s debut in *Funny Girl*. I imagined what I might say if they should ask me to be in their film, and I pretended it would be something like, “What, are you kidding? I’m a star! I’m not going to condescend to be in your little movie! I can wait until a bigger, better part comes along.”

A little later, while I was working out on one of the weight-lifting machines, I watched as the filmmakers photographed a young, cute, though kind of bland-looking guy, with a tattoo around his left bicep, doing biceps curls. I was jealous. Why hadn’t they asked me if they could film me lifting weights? Obviously, they didn’t think I was muscular enough or cute enough or WASPy enough or maybe it was because I didn’t have any cool tattoos. And look at how that guy with the tattoo is enjoying the attention—he was doing his biceps curls for the camera with a big smile on his face! I thought how all these gym bunnies probably were just dying to get into this film, how they lived for nothing so much as their little fifteen minutes of fame. I wished the filmmakers would just go away and leave me alone.

Then, as I was doing my shoulder exercises, one of the filmmakers started watching me. I didn’t like the feeling of being looked at like that—being assessed, sized up, made a meal of by this man I didn’t know. He motioned to another of the filmmakers to come watch me and together they conferred in a whisper about me. I tried to ignore them by averting my gaze. At the end of my set, I stood up and turned my back to them so as not to make eye contact with them. One of the filmmakers approached me and said, “Hi, we’re making a promotional film for the gym. You have a great little look and we’d like to film you working out. I don’t know if you’d like to be a part of that.”

As he said this I smiled, then said “No thanks.”

“Okay,” he said, and politely went away.

Rapidly I finished my workout, went downstairs to shower (and wondered if they would be doing any filming in the locker room—imagine!—naked men in the showers as part of a promotional film for the gym!—it’ll never happen), and went home.

Riding the subway uptown, I wondered if I’d done the right thing. Maybe I should have said yes—after all, what harm could it have done? And I could have been in an actual movie! Who knows how many people would see me in this movie?! Maybe Brian would see me in the movie—that would be great! For Brian had broken up with me after we’d been
dating for about five months, and I liked the idea that he would see me in the movie and realize that I had moved on from my relationship with him to bigger and better things—that I was doing things that he never even dreamed of. It might make him regret breaking up with me, make him see what a really wonderful person I really am, make him feel bad about himself and what he'd done to me (remember that Barbra Streisand kept her real name so, when she became a star, everyone would know it was still the Barbra they had tormented years ago in Brooklyn).

But then I thought that if these are my only reasons for wanting to be in the movie, then it's a good thing I said no; it seemed that being in the movie appealed to me mainly for vindictive reasons, and that wasn't justification enough for doing it.

Then I thought I was right to say no because if I had been in their movie, I wouldn't have been in control. It occurred to me that a big part of my wanting to be a movie star when I was a kid was being in control of the filmmaking. Even when I made a flop or got bad reviews, I orchestrated the whole thing—even when the press hounded me and I felt all I wanted to do was to be left alone with John Travolta or whomever it was that I was dating at the time, the point was, all of it was my own doing. Whereas in this case, I would have been at the mercy of someone else, of someone else's artistic vision.

Then I thought, it's kind of cool to have said no to a part in a movie. I always loved the idea that being a star meant you could go around saying, oh yes, I turned that part down, and then everybody would wonder what the movie would have been like if you had been in it, and they would think how different it would have been, how it might have been much better than the movie that finally got made, or how, on the other hand, it might have been awful but maybe at the same time wonderfully experimental (for example, if Carol Channing really had played Dolly Levi in the film version of Hello, Dolly!, or if Julie Andrews had played Eliza Doolittle in the film version of My Fair Lady, or if, as was originally intended, Shirley Temple had played Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, or Buddy Ebsen the Tin Man), and how, in a way, ultimately painful and sad it all was, because, finally, no one would ever really know.