I have argued throughout this book that, in scenes of sympathy, identity takes shape as social identity: that when subjects confront each other across a social divide, the elements that define the boundary constitute—at least for a moment—their subjectivity. My discussions of Daniel Deronda and The Picture of Dorian Gray are concerned less with the attempts to sympathize across class lines that characterized earlier texts than with the way, in these late-century novels, expressions of personal affinity and desire also function as assertions of cultural identity. Because late-nineteenth-century ideologies define identity increasingly in group terms—as, for instance, membership in a nation or in a sexual category—sympathy becomes more explicitly a matter of claiming identity with or distance from such group identifications. Indeed, in these late-nineteenth-century texts expressions of individual identity (identity that might be defined as difference from others) become increasingly difficult to differentiate from expressions of cultural identity (identity defined as membership in a group). Thus the self Daniel Deronda develops during the course of Eliot’s novel coincides neatly with his discovery of his Jewish background, while Dorian Gray’s desires construct an avowedly symbolic identity, one that—for nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers—embodies both late-nineteenth-century aestheticism and modern male homosexuality. An analysis of these readings is the way the scene of sympathy
is also—and always—a scene of cultural identification, in which the spectator's identity is inseparable from an imagining of the other's place; at stake as well is the way, in which, when individual and cultural identity collapse into one another, the other with whom one sympathizes must turn out to be—as in the case, dramatically, in Dorian Gray—one's self. A character who enact[s] the scene of sympathy within himself—indeed, of whom it might be said that he sympathizes only with himself—Dorian Gray both resists and exhibits the implications of the scene of sympathy as I have described it so far.

Dorian Gray's scene of sympathy inheres in the contrast between the hero's idealized body and his fantasy of that same body's degradation, and in the way the novel positions these as determinative images of cultural possibility. The contrast between the beautiful Dorian and his hideous picture recapitulates the scene of sympathy with which this book began: Dorian's picture is a fantasy in which moral decline rationalizes economic anxiety, marking a safe distance between the subject who might fall and the one who already has. In this case, the identity-defining other—who is, of course, Dorian himself—is manifestly both cultural fantasy and self-projection, a simultaneous internalization and anxiety of the scene Victorian fiction and Victorian culture located on the streets.

The constellation of emotions Dorian's scene evokes—the tension between fascination, repulsion, and attraction, for instance, in his relation to the picture—recalls other, earlier versions of the scene of sympathy and the recurrent questions that surround it. With whom, for example (or as whom) is the sympathetic spectator identified? What is the implication of self-picturing—the replacement of the self with a picture? Why is identity figured as an economic configuration, an exchange between images of degradation and ideality? Foregrounding these questions, the novel also revises them. Attributing moral significance to the blots and marks the picture accumulates, Dorian Gray makes of a paradigmatic aesthetic difference—the difference between beauty and ugliness—a paradigmatic cultural drama that, I wish to argue, finds its echo in contemporary formulations of cultural and political identity. The difference between Dorian's original wish and his memory of it, for instance—the difference between the impulsive expression of a desire not to age and a moral narrative about sin and retribution—recaptures the transformation of ex-
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experience into narrative that, as we have just seen in Daniel Deronda, characterizes the formation of cultural narratives. The drama Wilde's novel makes out of the difference between beauty and ugliness—for example, the danger of discovery, the obsession with the portrait, and the adventures in "low life" whose meaning Dorian confers on the surface of the portrait as soon as he looks there—suggests the formation of cultural identity as a moralization or rationalization of aesthetic choice whose meaning might be revealed in, or might just as well be hidden by, the face one chooses. Dorian Gray's scene of sympathy suggestively figures, in several ways and with relevance to several different discourses, the aesthetic dimension of modern and contemporary identities.

Neither person nor, exactly, character, Dorian, is, the novel tells us, a type of the "visible symbol" of the age. And, it has followed, the novel's critics have taken Dorian—and Wilde himself—as preeminent figures for and prefigurations of aesthetic culture and modern male homosexual identity. But what happens at the intersection of character and cultural embodiment: what does it mean, as Walter Benn Michaels asks, to imagine a culture "in the form of a person"?

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, historians and theorists of sexuality agree, the shaping activities of medicine and the law codified a variety of activities and modes of being into an identity.¹

¹ My sense of the way experience becomes cultural narrative, as argued here, is indebted to Walter Benn Michaels' account of cultural identities in Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). I refer to the transformation of events, actions, or choices into stories, as in the rendering of events or the ordering of a web of identities: producing narratives. See also Foucault's narrative about the construction of homosexuality as an identity in The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 (New York, Vintage, 1984), 40, and Linda Dowling's discussion of the formation of a homosexual cultural identity in Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).²


⁴ See, for example, Foucault, History of Sexuality.
In the final week of April 1895, Oscar Wilde stood in the prisoner's dock of the Old Bailey, charged in the dry words of the indictment, with "acts of gross indecency with another male person." The prosecutor for the Crown explained to the jury in more vivid terms what this meant: Wilde and his co-defendant had joined in an "abominable traffic" in which young men were induced to engage in "giving their bodies, or selling them, to other men. ..." Wilde answered these charges, as is well known, in a speech of sudden and impassioned energy. Passionately defending male love as the essence of aristocracy, a love "such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare," Wilde called it "pure" and "perfect" and "intellectual..." His superb self-possession and ringing peroration so electrifying that the courtroom listeners burst into spontaneous applause. The applause of Wilde's listeners marks the sudden emergence into the public sphere of a modern discourse of male love formulated in the late Victorian period by such writers as Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds and Wilde himself, a new language of sexual legitimation pointing forward to Anglo-American decriminalization and, ultimately, a fully developed assertion of homosexual rights.

Thus, although Basil's painting is entirely exterior to the text, it provides the reference point for a mode of representation that admits the visible, erotic presence of the male body.

When Basil Hallward confesses his love for Dorian Gray, those who dwell under contemporary signs of Hellenism cannot help but hear the opening notes of their own song: "A while ago I went to a party... after I had been in the room about ten minutes... I suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me... When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me, I knew that I had come face to face with someone [who]... would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul... I have always been my own master; had at least...


6 Cohen, "Writing Gone Wilde," 806.
Offered as originary moments in the instantiation of modern male homosexual identity, these scenes (from essays by Linda Dowling, Ed Cohen, and Jeff Nunnokawa) may also be regarded as illustrations from a cultural history under construction. Moments at which homosexuality is said, with some suddenness, to become visible, they manifestly demonstrate the imaginary status of cultural identity: they are opportunities for identification, places where the self may imaginatively be located. These are not just moments in the holding of a cultural identity, that is, but mirror scenes for the constitution of one, delineating for reader, spectator, consumer, and critic what I wish to call the imaginary body of culture. Rather than announcing that a particular identity has currency, visibility demonstrates that currency, and what "currency" means, in this sense, is availability for identification ("His attraction to Dorian Gray appears as nothing other than the first act of the now well-developed drama of self-realization we call coming out").

Registering the transformation of an image of degradation into one of ideality, of the degraded object of sympathy into a figure in whose place anyone—ahematically, everyone—may see themselves, these images exchange a scene of sympathy for one of identification, replacing one kind of sympathy (revulsion as secret sympathy; sympathy with society's "victim") with another (sympathy as identification and desire, so that the other's place becomes one a reader might wish to occupy). For to enter into visibility is to give up some degree of cultural difference at the very moment one claims to become part of the common realm in which cultures (or, more precisely, images of cultural identity) circulate. As theorists of the visible from Jean-Baudrillard to Kaja Silverman have pointed out, rather than registering the emergence into public light of something already in existence, visibility is that something, signaling the inseparability of ideality from representation. Cultural identity is an identification with culture itself, both in its specific and more general forms.9

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7 Nunnokawa, "Historical Detail." p.119.
8 Ibid.
9 I set, of course, apart the fact that same-sex desire can often seem more revolting to the individual in question than the sympathy it elicits. But I am writing here on the way in which identity politics depend upon a claim for victim status and on the blend of sympathy and...
Franco Moretti, Werner Sollors, and others have described a shift in constructions of identity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the (more or less) given to the invented, invoking Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities, for instance. Sollors describes the way in which aristocratic power declined in the eighteenth century: the immediate connectedness of the aristocracy was replaced by a mediated form of cohesion that depended, among other things, on literacy and 'national' (and ethnic) literatures. Literature and the circulation of printed texts in general, Anderson argues, assist in the formation of communities circumscribed less by birth or territorial boundaries than by their members' shared knowledge.

And imagined communities, of course, require imagined identities—identities not limited (as the communities are not) to categories of nationality or ethnicity. Dowling's history of the Oxford Movement, for instance, reveals the embedding of one culture in another and details the making of a new culture, a new group identity, out of an already existing tradition. What Dowling traces is, precisely, "the role of Victorian Hellenism in legitimating homosexuality as an identity." Yet still requiring explanation is the relationship between the previously uncodified in-dish and the now-codified group, since the formation of a new identity is the formation of new identities, and the invention of personhood is the invention of personhoods. If both formations require new identities, that is, they also require the initialization of desires for those identities; and, as a corollary, the initialization of desire for identity itself.12

identification one might hear—and Dowling certainly hears—in the applause for Wilde's courtroom peroration.


11 Dowling, Hellenism and Homosexuality, 31.

12 Foucault's work has, of course, explored in detail the means by which subjectivity is produced through techniques such as confession and self-examination. My concern here turns closely to the problem Judith Butler explores in The Psychic Life of Power: Theater in Reference, Stanford University Press, 1997, when she asks what causes us to desire our own subjection (see 102).
In response to a literary-critical tradition oblivious to the homosexual or homosocial content of literary texts, recent readings have been devoted to the act of decoding. In the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the goal has been to return the novel to its specific historical and sexual context, marking against what Eve Sedgwick calls the "alibi of abstraction": the absent member, the evacuated sexuality, of its standard interpretations. Yet the abstractions on which Wilde's novel relies, the empty terms of its readings, and perhaps above all its definitive binaries (beauty/ugliness) are unavoidable; it is, after all, the affiliation between the aristocratic male body and the abstraction "beauty" that allows for the novel's general currency.

Regarded as one of modern homosexual identity's most important icons, Dorian Gray is also a paradigmatic image of masculine beauty and desirability. In returning some degree of abstraction to the novel's interpretation, therefore—or at least returning to the abstractions on which the novel relies—I wish to locate desire for Dorian, and Dorian's desire, within a more inclusive construction of identity, one in which Dorian's wish to change places with his picture rework identity itself, have elaborated as culture's visible form, to be one of the modern subject's most sought-after objects of desire. Thus the late-nineteenth-century ideology that, following Foucault's logic, is said to have redefined self in terms of sexuality—in which "who I am" becomes "what I want"—is here reimagined with ontogeny as desire's subject, so that what is wanted is, precisely, "who I am": identity itself.

Dorian's identity inheres in—the act of active interchange between the novel's constructions of beauty and ugliness, and interpretations tend to rest on the meanings attributed to each. Yet it has...
never been noted that the moral weight the picture comes to bear during the course of the novel—the meaning Dorian himself comes to attribute to it—is far removed from the initial whimsy that brings it into being. Hier, from the middle of the novel, is Dorian’s recollection of his wish: “He had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the face on the canvas bear the burdens of his passions and sins; that the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and thought” (119). But what he actually says (at the novel’s beginning) is this: “If it were I who was always to be young, and the picture that was to grow old!” (49). Dorian’s wish for an exchange is itself exchanged, his original, impulsive desire for youth and his aversion to aging replaced by a morally charged scenario in which the picture becomes the bearer of “passions and sins.” And this exchange, or false memory, is actually true to the novel’s economics of degradation, since, as the picture does, what matters is not the type of action committed—but the kind of “degradation”—but rather (as if such matters were countable, and self-evidently so) the amount. The picture pictures accumulation, depicting not the detail of experience but the fact of it; we can’t know, then, looking at it, what experience it records—on the history of the novel’s reception, and the continuing need to decode the picture, suggests.

For Dorian, sin, old age, suffering, and even “thoughts” are rendered equivalent in a generalized picture of degradation that looks like this: “The cheeks would become hollow or fleshless; yellow crow’s feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its brightness; the mouth would gape or droop; would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men are. There would be the wrinkled throat, blue-veined hands, the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood” (153). Or maybe this: “Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not until they examined the rings that they recognized who it was” (264). Victorian identity drama, the novel suggests the extent to which identity was, for the Victorians, an aesthetic category. For in insisting on the collapse between Dorian and his picture at its end—the novel’s most painterly passage. Wilde suggests that Dorian’s image is largely a copy of beauty, one that refers to the disparity between exterior and interior values. The aesthetic movement, then, underlines this being Victorian morality’s opposite, develops that morality’s implicit aesthetics.
The speculations of the first passage ("the mouth would gape and droop") are, for all intents and purposes, fulfilled by the second. And, in truth, as the picture reduces all degradation to a common currency, that of ugliness, it exposes the surprising presumption, given the subtleties of taste Dorian comes to embody, that when it comes to ugliness there is no question of taste (at least for Wilde’s readers—in this sense both the picture and the book express a widely shared fantasy about ugliness). Age and sex, the novel’s language suggests in its circulation of ugliness terms—"hideous," "horrible," "revolting"—are interchangeable not only with each other but also with other terms of the "loathsome," such as the figure of the "horrid old Jew" who owns the theater in which Sibyl Vane performs, or the grandfather of whom Dorian has "hateful memories.

Dorian’s beauty similarly lacks specificity; like his ugliness, which attaches itself indistinguishably to the figures "old" and "Jew," it both evokes and denies specific affiliations. For despite the possibility of naming these affiliations—sedgwick, for instance, contrasts Wilde’s middle-class Irishness with Dorian’s aristocratic Englishness, while for Dowling Dorian’s beauty has a Hellenic textual history—within its immediate social and cultural context, the novel’s ideal of beauty ("gold hair, blue eyes, rose-red lips") contains an evacuation of meaning: it is meant to signify nothing other than beauty itself. Thus binding together its ideal of beauty with its exchangeable images of degradation, the novel functions in its own celebration of insincerity as a multiplication of personalities into a stark division and accountability: the difference between beauty and ugliness.

Dorian’s relation to his picture has, of course, been theorized in many ways, not the least powerful of which rely on the moral terms the novel itself provides. Figuring Dorian’s identity in an economy of appearances, however—the difference and exchange between beauty and ugliness—the novel allows for another kind of interpretation, one that has more to do with its role in a history of cultural identities than with the history of its literary interpretations. For the difference between beauty and ugliness per se participates in the underlying binaries of certain modern cultural narratives of identity, narratives that depend less on specific details of identity than on the positive or negative valuation of identities the posting of

desire or its absence. Such narratives, that is, resolve what might be a multiplicity of identities into a choice between identities, in the form of a difference between self and other. And this difference, I wish to argue, in turn reflects the condition of belonging or not belonging to a group. Embodying the imaginative possibilities of the scene of sympathy as I have described it, for instance, the contrast between beautiful and ugly images of Dorian Gray reproduces the aesthetics of contemporary identity politics, in which identity takes shape as the difference between negative and positive cultural projections. Identity politics attempts to bestow value on identities the dominant culture devalues or to transform ugliness (a particular identity as perceived by the dominant culture) into beauty (that same identity, as projected in response by the group so named), and its mechanism is the transformative power of the idea— and image— of the group. In the “images” of identity politics, the individual and the group function as reflexes and projections of each other— mutually constitutive images— with the group functioning as the engine of the scene for identity, the body out of which individual bodies are made. Indeed, it is because of the similarity between the ideologically constructed identities of the late nineteenth century, the image making of identity politics, and Dorian Gray (signature of identity as an interplay between valued and devalued images of the self) that in Wilde’s novel, “we may catch the early strain of an identity politics whose anthem will eventually become loud enough to make itself heard even on Saint Patrick’s Day.” Even as the novel refers to a specific politics, however, the aesthetic form by means of which this politics is represented— its reliance on an idealized image of masculine identity— makes the character Dorian Gray widely available for identification; for, at the very least, “literary” sympathy.

My argument thus situates Dorian Gray in the context of late-nineteenth-century ideologies that may be viewed as precursors of a modern symbolic politics of identity ideologies in which the individual is with-in—

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16 Nunokawa, “Homosexual Desire,” 315. Dowling recognizes, implicitly, the role of the group in the transforming of homosexuality’s image: “such writers as Symonds and Pater find the opening in which ‘homosexuality’ might be understood as a mode of self-development and diversity, no longer as a sin or crime or disastrous civic disability but a social identity functioning within a field of shared human potentialities, now recognized as shared” (Hellenism and Homosexuality, 31).
creasing frequency imagined as a member of a group. Relevant here is the Foucauldian account of a shift from action to essence in the formulation of nineteenth-century identities. But more useful is the model of nationalism, which serves as a general model of identity of the nineteenth century onward; and which accounts for both the affective passion and the discursive trope of male bonding in Daniel Deronda and Dorian Gray. For nationalist ideology positions identity as the culmination of a narrative of desire and its effect of group membership; it is, desire for group membership is indistinguishable from desire for identity per se (thus the relevance, once more, of Julia Kristeva’s description of nationalisms as a condition in which “to be” is “to belong”). In this context, Dorian’s wish to change places with his own idealized image may be understood not only as a desire to be an object of desire, or as a desire for a particular identity, but more fundamentally as a desire for identity itself.

Jeff Nunokawa writes that the achievement of Wilde’s novel was to give modern homoerotic identity a human face. And indeed, the novel accomplishes this with precisely the kind of narrative sleight-of-hand that, belieing the direction of the narrative itself, enables Nunokawa’s vision to pass without eliciting the obvious questions: how, exactly, “human”? and, more compellingly, which “face”? The conversion of loss into gain, the novel effects—the way the enduring image of the beautiful Dorian emerges (if one agrees that it does) from an ostensible narrative of decline—resembles what might be called the conversion narrative of identity politics: Dorian dies into representation, his beauty, prefiguring what Dowling refers to as the current wide acceptance of homosexuality by the dominant culture, functioning as a kind of projection into the future: an invitation to the transformation of the image of homosexuality itself.

The novel’s erotics, I thus wish to suggest, is finally a cultural one, and its language of sexual desire supports a narrative of cultural desire, a desire for cultural embodiment (the same desire, expressed as both an attraction toward and revulsion against an “object” of sympathy, that, I have suggested, shapes earlier scenes of sympathy). Dorian’s wish is a wish for beauty, but Dorian’s beauty is a figure for the desirability of a certain modern identity...
configuration of identity; for the achievement of identity as a place in a cultural narrative.

In his book on the politics of American identity, Our America, Walter Michaels takes aim at what he calls the essentialist bias of all accounts of cultural identity: the way in which, in his words, these accounts "understand culture as a kind of person." To understand culture as a kind of person is, for Michaels, to tie actions to essence, identifying oneself with ancestors whose experiences and memories one did not share. To no good end, cultures are imagined to possess identity, argues Michaels, and inherent value is (therefore) attributed to their survival.

But how is it that a set of practices (his definition of culture) comes to be identified with personhood? How do habits acquire the nimbus of identity; why is the sum more than its parts? (Or, how is it that "modern homosexual identity," comes to acquire a "face," and what does it mean that it does?) Our answer, as I have suggested, might lie in Foucault's discussion of the way late-nineteenth-century medical and juridical discourse transformed practice into identity, making "possible the formulation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified." While this formulation begs the question, since rather than explaining personification, it personifies—"homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf"—it nevertheless suggests that desirable images of cult.
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Cultural identity emerges in response to, and is inseparable from, what Judith Butler calls the “injurious term” that gives a particular identity its name—the term that, in the Althusserian scenario of interpellation, calls it into being. And it suggests, too, via the rhetoric of personification, the role group identity plays in this identity-forming narrative: that it is possible to speak on one’s behalf only when identity is defined in collective terms, as something shared with others.

If we pursue the implications of Foucault’s narrative, in which conflicting images of identity exist in necessary relation to one another, then Wilde’s picture-painting scene—the scene in which Dorian recognizes himself “as if for the first time”—begins to resemble a positive alternative to the Althusserian scenario in which the subject is hailed as a subject of the law. Indeed, the scene provides a response, in the form of a counter-narrative, to the question Butler poses about Althusser’s scenario: “Why should I turn around?”

The lad started, as if awakened from some dream. “Is it really finished?”

He murmured, stepping down from the platform.

“Quite finished,” said the painter. “And you have sat splendidly today. I am awfully obliged to you.”

“That is entirely due to me,” broke in Lord Henry. “Isn’t it, Mr. Gray?”

Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly in front of his picture, and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. (48)

For Butler, such an invitation is itself compelling: the subject turns, despite his or her ostensible guilt, because identity is an offer that cannot be refused. Wilde’s version, imagined as response or resistance to this scene, reproduces its form but not its content. Dorian’s response to the picture lacks a faculty of self-hailing, in which the self answers to its own desire rather than to the admonitory call of the law. What seems important, then, is not the unacknowledged name of the self that turns (must turn that self)—so the question goes—already be a subject in order to turn? but

22 Butler, Psychic Life of Power; 104.
23 Ibid., 108.
rather the fact of the scene’s implication: the way both Althusser and Wilde figure the production of identity as a turn, imagining identity as that which, in a narrative of desire, the subject moves toward. What compels and confers identity, in both these scenarios, is nothing other than desire for it.24

And that desire, once again, is the desire to belong. The self hailed here, as in Althusser, is not one can be, wholly self-appointed; it is rather the effect of the existence of the group, of society. For, as Butler suggests, the desire for identity is the desire to be constituted socially, thus identity cannot take shape as the image of social life.25 And so it does in Dorian Gray. In a discussion preceding Dorian’s arrival, Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward discuss the partial nature of their own and others’ identities: one possesses intellect and talent, another beauty, another wealth (“War rank and wealth, Henry; my brains, such as they are—up art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray’s good looks”). Dorian, in this conversation, is said to possess only beauty: “He is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should always be here in winter when we have no flowers to look at” (25), and when he appears he is indeed depicted as not yet in possession of an identity—“enough and available for one.” Yet at the end of this scene—the scene in which Basil paints the famous portrait—Dorian possesses all the qualities Henry, Basil, and formerly Dorian himself possessed individually. Indeed, the apparent fluidity of identity boundaries in this scene is countered by the way Dorian’s identity emerges as the only one that counts (there are three bodies here, but finally only one identity), and he is not only an image of the others’ desire but an embodiment of their very qualities: Basil’s images and Henry’s words.

24 The very problem of the subject’s status in Althusser’s scenario suggests the answer I propose in this chapter: the subject, “already” one, locates subjecthood outside the self because cultural identity, which appears as such scenarios as identity tout court, is an external construct.25

25 “Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence because a certain consistency takes hold of my form that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially” (Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 104). “Existence,” in this formulation, is the same as being constituted socially: life is equated with cultural life, with existing within a context of a social group.

As Lee Edelman has argued, Wilde's novel inscribes identity in a narrative of desire.26 From the novel's initial representations of Dorian as beautiful vacuity and potential to the "self" that comes into the self face that Basil had never seen before, to Dorian's "recognition" of himself in the portrait, identity is something Dorian achieves in the picture-painting scene, and it is the result not just of his own wish, but of the combined yearnings of all those he seduces: the group is imagined as a body, such member possessing some aspect of the whole, and Dorian is the projected image of that whole—a composite body. It is this wholeness that he recognizes as if for the first time in the portrait, this wholeness that makes the picture the place he wants to occupy. Desire for Dorian—including Dorian's desire for himself as picture—desire for the imagined wholeness of the group indeed is the impossibility of distinguishing between desire for a particular individual and desire for cultural embodiment that Dorian's wish to change places with the picture defines, and that defines the portrait of Dorian Gray.

Thus when Dorian's image appears on the canvas, the very picture of Basil's desire for him and of Henry's influence, not only does the novel dramatize what Ed Cohen has called the inscription of homoerotic desire, but it also allegorizes the emergence of cultural identity per se as an effect of triangulated desire. It is the idea of culture that takes shape here, and as, an imaginary body, and the idea of the group—the self as an idealized projection of others—that enables the explicitation, or at least the overlapping, of the injurious name with the beautiful face. If the policeman's call is the call of the dominant culture, defining the respondent as guilty before the law, the alternative picture illustrates the reverse fantasy, or fantasy of reversal: it is an allegory of being interpellated as an object of desire. Collapsing the difference Freud wished to maintain, in his discussion of homosexuality, between desire for and possession of the other, it suggests a fantasy of such perfect sympathy with the other that the other turns out to be, for better or worse, the self.27

Producing Dorian's idealized image, the painting scene thus allegorizes the element of desire that transforms practice into personhood. For a set

of practice does not constitute a culture; only a set of practices endowed with meaning and value does. And such a set of practices, as Michael's argument suggests, takes an embodied form: culture is always what someone (the eyes, in Dorian Gray makes clear, one's own self) imagined as someone else is doing. Culture is not a "set" of practices (Michael's definition) but rather a reading of them: an interpretation that unifies disparate practices, attaching meaning to action and in this way individualizing it, with the idea of the individual—of actions performed by someone—giving coherence to the activity of the group. Dorian Gray thus figures in this argument as an exemplary image of a person who is also an embodiment of culture—an embodiment of a particular culture, to be sure, but also an allegory for the way culture in general takes shape "as a kind of person."

But what kind of culture, and what kind of person? The rhetoric of exchange—specifically, of changing places—that informs Dorian Gray's wish and structures his story further underscores the importance of the idea of culture in the imagining of modern identities. For the self, even when imagined as one's own, is constituted with reference to an external image. It is pictured elsewhere in Dorian Gray's case, in the form of an image readily available within and appropriated from the dominant culture (an image, we might go so far as to say, of the dominant culture. For the beautiful face, making no sense of its desirability, defines the dominant culture's requirements for beauty, hence in class determinist's account—and in national one Right's). Dorian symbolizes his era in more ways than one: his beauty is no more idealized within the context of his coterie than in Victorian England generally, and it is the abstractness of that beauty, of course—the pristine signification of his cultural identity—that enables not only Dorian, but the novel itself, to "pass."

And here the narrative of identity politics gives way—briefly—to that of cosmetology: to the very real (no longer magical, that is) business of choosing a face.

Dorian wishes, of course, for both faces, the beautiful and the ugly—not for one or the other, but rather for the exchange between them. And his desire is fulfilled not just by the beautiful face but by the ugly one with its marks and blotches, as well—and by the way each supplements the other, each suggests meanings the other fails to provide. For despite the exchangeability of images discussed earlier in this chapter, Wilde's novel does attribute value to ugliness. As part of the narrative culminating in
Dorian Gray's death, the picture evinces the temporality he rejects: it ages, wrinkles, degrades. But it also reflects a process of accumulation: the portrait turns sin into gain by rendering it visible. This is, after all, where Dorian's actions appear, where his experience accumulates like capital. Like a miser visiting his wealth, Dorian obsessively checks his profits, each blemish and wrinkle challenging the novel's moralizing logic of accumulation. Despite the absence of individuality, the novel's general representation of ugliness suggests, then, the accumulation of marks on the picture's surface does suggest the possibility of individuality here, a fear something is happening. Why, then, is it not a pretty picture?

In the Murad advertisement (Fig. 1), an advertisement for a wrinkle-removing cream for women and a suggestive updating and revision of Dorian Gray's picture: the lines on the woman's face are replaced by—indeed, only visible as—the advertiser's lines, labeled with the contents of a cultural narrative (and directed toward both the woman's image and the spectator) —"the day you totaled the car"—the projected replacement of one face with another replaces one narrative with another. The face (and, indeed, the identity of its owner) is thus figured as a kind of map, each mark rendering experience visible, dressing a site at which something happened. But of course rather than simply making the invisible visible, the marks denote the absence of anything but cultural narrative: the map, like Dorian's hideous portrait, figures the inseparability of "real" self and cultural projections.

Since identity becomes visible only when marked as cultural narrative, both identities—the ugly (or less desirable) and the beautiful—appear as pictures (hence, as in my analysis of "A Christmas Carol," visibility itself signals and resolves desire, the distance between the self and its representations). For the fantasy, and the parallel in contemporary culture, is that one can participate in (embody) cultural value without giving up one's true self. In the advertisement as in Wilde's novel the "ugly" self occupies the position of the real, and is similarly imagined as detachable, that to which one necessarily refers, one's detachable face is also—as in Victorian scenes of sympathy—that which one need not but that for the grace of God, and plastic surgery, acknowledge, or, indeed, be. And, again, as in Dorian Gray and Deronda as well, the ugly face is the particularized face, the attractive face generalized—an expansion of experience rendering it available for a
Fig. 1. The marks of experience. Dorian Gray revisited.
spectators' projections.28 (The femininity of this example is thus relevant to the novel's construction of Dorian's identity as sympathetic, for here as in Daniel Deronda sympathetic identity is rendered with generalized and feminized identity, with the visual cues that conventionally invite a spectator's identification and fandom.)

What happens, then, to the self one does not want to be—the self whose identifications are, or have been, refused? This advertisement's persuasive tone relies on its ability to appeal to a spectator who wants to erase, but also values, experience's marks: with its labels insisting on the very debilities the cream is to erase, the ad suggests not exactly (or not only) the effacement of experience but rather its materialization or internalization. Like Dorian Gray, it offers the spectator an opportunity to embody the cultural ideal yet preserve as alternate, "authentic," self—not exactly lumping the body that records that experience, but rather maintaining as mental picture the memory of such a body (though perhaps with less energy than one desires to actively maintain, or attempting to achieve, the culturally idealized one). Dorian's obsessive return to his hideous image—the very he contorts his "face" in a spirit of scientific inquiry in order to gauge their effect on the picture (134), and more tellingly the way he finds himself "enamored" of it (125)—suggests a similar desire for a self that one can picture perfectly self overcut, one's own. For the attraction of the ugly self, here as in the case of Hugh Boone, that hideous man with the twisted lip, is the lure of authenticity: of the cultural authority granted the idea of the true self (as it sees itself) by its tradition of cultural narratives. Wilde's novel can appear to be less about sin—either sin in general or any particular variety—than it is about the materialization of particular images of cultural identity and of the idea of cultural identity itself.29

28. Here, as in Daniel Deronda, it becomes evident that the generalized character—the type—by definition, compulsory object, the projection of collective desire about the group's desires and about the way it views, or wishes to view, itself. 29. Even as the medical/juridical establishment creates a type, Dowling's analysis suggests, a cultural tradition for that type emerges—deliberately and self-consciously, using as its framework another's previously existing tradition. The form that the "coded counterdiscourse" of homosexuality takes, as Dowling shows, is as unrecognizable as the framework used to produce it. For instance, any discursive analysis of identity is about identity and identity as discourse. The analysis thus suggests that the discursive analysis of identity as discourse is about identity and identity as discourse. The analysis thus suggests that the discursive analysis of identity as discourse is about identity and identity as discourse.
The idea of culture invests a single person’s actions with the identity—or shared meaning—of the group: put another way, cultural identity invests the identity of the group in the actions of a single person. Culture, according to this logic, always embodies the group, always a matter of value manifested in someone’s appearance, someone’s place. Indeed, as a matter of imagining the other as a person with whom one would like to change places (‘I wish I could change places with you, Dorian,’ says Lord Henry wistfully [256]), cultural identity collapses person into place: identity becomes a cultural position, a place one can occupy. And just as culture depends on the illusion that a practice is more than a practice, so too does changing places substitute being for doing—so that culture makes itself, and reproduces itself, by substituting identity for practice, imagining practice in embodied form. The scenario of ‘changing places’ then creates a scenario of imitation (I do what you do) with a scenario of replaced identity (I become you, put myself in your place) in which identity, seemingly kept intact, is in fact revealed as nothing more than a fraction of place: Person and soul, the identity one wants—which one wants because it is pictured—is replaced by a position available for occupation. (In the world according to Dorian Gray—the world that, the Murad ad tells us, we still inhabit—there is always a more desirable version of ‘you’ out there.) ‘Changing places’ replaces narrative and temporality with substitution and magic, exchanging a condition of desire in which identity is always slipping away with one in which identity is to be had for the asking—or the wishing.

Even as it is said to signal the new visibility, the emergence into public light, of late-Victorian homosexual culture, then, The Picture of Dorian Gray allegorizes the general desire that transforms practice into culture, that marks the difference between practice and culture. Culture appears here as a structure in which practices have meaning precisely because, and only because, someone else is performing them. Why is it, I have asked of Foucault’s account of nineteenth-century identities, that individuals not only accept the terms of their medicalization, but they take on those identities, begin to speak ‘in their own behalf’? The eroticization and idealization of group identity in the projection of an imaginary body figures culture’s invitation to spectators to recognize themselves—and seek to
place themselves—as a symbolic structure not of their own creation. Dorian's beauty signals the (illusory) achievement of an identification with culture itself: it is the beauty of identity as wish-fulfillment, a fantasy of experience invested with value. Desire for Dorian captures the law of cultural narrative as the context in which, at a historical moment which is our as much as Dorian Gray's, self-recognition can and does take place. Identity as this novel figures it—and, I have suggested, in contemporary identity politics as well—is the imagined occupation of a place in a cultural narrative, a place that takes visible form as an imaginary body whose identification with the group gives new meaning to the visual fullness of the Lacanian imaginary.

Diana Fuss has defined identity politics as "the tendency to base one's politics on a sense of personal identity—as gay, as Jewish, as Black, as female." But this definition classifies as personal what are obviously terms of group affiliation, terms whose appropriation guarantees visibility in the symbolic realms of culture and politics. In the model I have described here, identity politics is reimagined, following the model of late-nineteenth-century ideologies, as the creation of a desirable identity, as mechanism the projection of that identity in an imaginary body. The same desire for visibility—without, of course, the accompanying political concern—to manifest in the desire to embody a spectacularized, mass-produced version of beauty. In both cases, cultural identity takes shape as an implicit opposition between images of ideality and degradation; in both, identity is constituted as an exchange between identities—identities imagined, finally, as different versions of the self.

The body imagined as desirable, I have suggested, is the body of culture: a projection of the image of culture itself as an imaginary body. Such a formation depends not just on the desirability of particular identities but on the pawning of identity itself as desirable, as that with which everyone must identify, that which everyone must desire. Thus embodied, identity presents itself as something to be desired, something to be wished for, something others could imagine being, imagining identity as a body whose place a spectator may wish to occupy, and as a person with whom one might like to change places. Wilde's novel makes visible the element

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of desire—and the transformations of sympathy—out of which cultures are made.

The sympathetic spectator does not, as we have seen, sympathize with everyone—but all when sympathy is explicitly linked to self-identification, as in identity politics. In this way, identity politics calls into question the universal universality, or blankness, of the ethical, liberal subject—the subject, as Eliot demonstrates in Daniel Deronda, whose identity is meant to transcend the logic of group identity on which it is founded. In Eliot’s novel as in Wilde’s, and elsewhere in this book, the rhetoric of exchangeability and impersonality on which liberal subjectivity rests—the equalizing gesture of “there but for the grace of God”—is circumscribed by the particularity of the subject’s identifications. From this perspective, the illustration from Adam Smith with which I began—his contention that, try as we might to imagine ourselves in another’s place, we are limited to the evidence of our own experience—may be newly understood to suggest the way claims for the imaginative possibilities of sympathy in Western liberal thought are undermined by the very structures of group identity within which modern identities are imagined.

To return, then, to Michaels’s problem with the personification of culture: the problem (if it is one) is not that we imagine culture as a person, and that we could have it some other way. The problem is that culture is, essentially, the imagining of the self in another’s place (or, as in Dorian Gray, in another place): a fantasy of participating in an experience that has meaning precisely because it is embodied, because it is—a true (agonistically—someone else’s). And the logic of culture, at least in this account—resolving, as it does the contradictions of identity, the nagging feeling that one’s real self is really somewhere else—sympathy’s logic, as well. There is no less desire in the eye that turns toward the beggar than there is in Dorian Gray’s eye as it turns toward his beautiful picture, for to the extent that the beggar figures the “truth” of middle-class identity, and allows for the construction of an idealized, culturally valued alternative, his gaze will animate that of the subject who, professedly, would rather look away.