Disney’s animated phenomenon *Frozen* (2013) has been criticized by America’s religious right for its homosexual subtext which allegedly advocates non-Christian values to impressionable audiences. This essay does not dispute the presence of such a subtext, but argues that that the film’s gay codings, rather than celebrating and encouraging homosexuality, invoke bigoted stereotypes, negative psychoanalytic categories and masochistic cinematic conventions. The film represents homosexuality in an ostensibly non-discriminatory manner, but undermines this potential through a range of cultural prejudices and conventionalized conservative cinematic techniques. The last of these elements entails the film’s most sinister approach to homosexuality, reflexively linking a masochistic representation of its gay-coded characters with the ideological passivity of cinematic spectatorship.

This essay explores the film’s negative representations. The first of these is an apparently positive representation of female homosexuality which demonstrates how *Frozen*’s gender differentiation revolves around an eroticized approach to femininity conducive to the male gaze. Male homosexuality, in contrast, is depicted as comical, violent, easily manipulated into heterosexuality or, most insidiously, as a thematisation of realist film’s masochistic oscillation between cinematic grammatical coherence and alienating incoherence. The post-structuralist context for this process is Steven Heath’s (1985) understanding of how film repeats Freud’s *fort/da* metaphor, replicating the child’s game in which the lack of agency involved in separation from the mother is restaged at the allegorical level. For both the child and the film spectator this involves a ritual of agency in what is actually a passive situation; the child enacting separation before it is forced on it, the spectator recognizing those moments inherent in cinema in which grammatical inconsistency threatens the impression of transcendent creativity produced by the seemingly un-authored nature of grammatical consistency. For both, the revelation of the lack of agency is masochistic, staging unpleasure in order to better enjoy the deferred pleasure of either the mother’s or grammatical consistency’s return. When *Frozen* links these pleasures to its male gay codings, in both visual and narrative terms, it enacts a complex identification of spectatorial pleasure with a masochistic understanding of homosexuality.
Homophbic criticisms of *Frozen* exist within a broader understanding of how it subverts the fairy-tale’s classic conservative binary between active male and passive female. This, for members of the religious right such as Steven Greydanus, is symptomatic of “Obama’s post-evolutionary America” (2014). One of the film’s two princesses, Anna (Kristen Bell), may flirt with the idea of being rescued from her loneliness by a Handsome Prince, but such longings are shown to be a myth, and to be worthy of ridicule. When she tells gruff Kristoff (Jonathan Groff) that she got engaged to the Prince that she just met, his unbelieving response breaks the established trope of fairy-tales in which ‘true love’ occurs instantaneously and inevitably. When the Handsome Prince Hans (Santino Fontana) later reveals his sinister intentions, the prospective lovers’ earlier duet, coded with all the fire-works exploding/vocal harmonizing conventions of the Disney fairy-tale genre, is shown to be an illusion.

But, for conservative criticism, the film’s liberal agenda becomes “evil, just evil”, as Kevin Swanson would have it (Tashman 2014), when it shifts its “post-evolutionary” (Greydanus 2014) gaze towards homosexuality. If, as Kathryn Skaggs claims, the “the homosexual agenda, to normalize the practice, was not simply an underlying message in the movie *Frozen*, but is the actual story” (Wong 2014), then the film’s principal gay character is Princess Anna’s sister Elsa (Idina Menzel), one of the film’s two central protagonists. The sisters are introduced as children, when Elsa, gifted with uncontrollable ice magic, accidently injures Anna with a blast of ice to the head. To protect Anna, and others, the young Elsa is told to “conceal, don’t feel” her emotions by her stern father. After the parents’ death the two sisters grow up in the same castle but distanced from one another, building towards the inevitable revelation of Elsa’s repressed abilities at her coming-of-age coronation as Queen. Greydanus’ criticism notes the way that her magical powers differentiate her from the social world, claiming that “Elsa is notably different from other people. ‘Born this way or cursed?’ asks the troll king, and her parents confirm that she was born that way” (2014, original emphasis). Greydanus then outlines how Elsa represses and eventually releases her “true identity” and notes that “Elsa at no time shares her sister Anna’s romantic longings, nor does she show any interest in a male suitor or in being courted. (At one point a male character remarks that, as heir, Elsa would be preferable to Anna, but ‘no one was getting anywhere with her’)” (2014, original emphasis).

The manifestation of Elsa’s outing, after she flees into a wilderness frozen by her furious magical response to Anna’s attempts to open up the repressed castle to the outside world, is
coded in a gender-specific manner, however. R. Kurt Osenlund’s review, which embraces this outing, is indicative of how this gender specificity works: “Elsa belts and struts her way through a gotta-be-me power ballad, and though the film ultimately insists that Elsa not be a fierce queen, but a magnanimous one, the moment is unmistakably drag-esque—a self-styled fabulization” (2013). Elsa transforms, in this scene, from a huddled figure constricted by her socially-conditioned regalia, the full extent of her body (which is partially concealed behind her enveloping arms) outside the frame of a medium shot (Fig.1), to a strutting, sexualized figure, in both senses of the word, her entire body (and particularly the over-exaggerated distinction between waist and hips) revealed through a long shot (Fig.2). She not only magically changes her clothing and hairstyle, but awakens her sexual nature along with her homosexuality.

![Fig.1](image)
This transformation may represent a positive, anti-discriminatory approach to homosexuality, which is Osenlund’s reading, or at least to female homosexuality. But contrasting Elsa’s sexuality with the film’s male gay-coded characters suggests something more ominous, and reveals that the film treats female homosexuality and male homosexuality in very different terms. The former, if the bearer of this representation looks something like every other impossibly beautiful member of the Disney princess ‘race’, can be rendered into easily palatable form. In this sense, both Elsa’s sexualized objectivity and her dangerous magical unconscious, which leads her to be referred to as a “monster” by some of the film’s less broadminded characters on several occasions, link her with Karen Boyle’s observation that “the two genres in which lesbians have most commonly appeared are heterosexual pornography (where the performance of lesbianism can be recouped for the male gaze) and horror (where the lesbian is made monstrous)” (2005: 154). Although Elsa’s objectified and monstrous elements do not reach the extremes of either pornography or horror, they do demonstrate a form of gender differentiation that focuses on the erotic and mysterious elements of the feminine, and which offers female homosexuality as a spectacle that, although it might threaten patriarchy to some extent at the narrative level, does not threaten it at the visual level.

Frozen’s representation of male homosexuality, on the other hand, in what Laura Mulvey calls a “world ordered by sexual imbalance [in which] pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (1993: 116), cannot be represented in the same
aesthetic, sexual terms. So, even if the film ostensibly breaks the traditional narrative binary of active male/passive female, it reinforces cinema’s traditional visual binary. *Frozen*’s male homosexual codings are variously negative, revealing sexuality that is either non-aesthetic, disavowed, alterable or masochistic.

The most overtly addressed of these male homosexual characters, in terms of both the film text and discussions about it, is the trader Oaken (Chris Williams). This is a character that Anna almost literally stumbles across when, after pursuing Elsa into the frozen wilderness, she is forced to take refuge in his trading post. When Oaken calls out to his family enjoying a sauna, a brief shot reveals that he “has a family consisting of a same-sex partner and a bunch of children” (Greydanus 2014) (Fig.3). Greydanus understands this revelation as an attempt to “allow sharp-eyed homophile viewers to draw their own conclusions about just what sort of ‘family’ this is”. This is because, “[f]rom the perspective of Hollywood filmmakers, while it’s not yet possible for a mainstream family film to have overtly gay characters or themes, the heteronormativity of traditional children’s entertainment has been problematized.” Inserting brief challenges to patriarchy, such as this moment, make Hollywood filmmakers “feel good about themselves when they do, and it’s something they can talk about at parties” (Greydanus 2014).

Greydanus noticed Oaken’s same-sex partner only after reading a homophile article which has a much more triumphal approach, claiming that “[t]he adult in the sauna is clearly
implied to be his husband. Best yet, Oaken and his partner have a family — and it's not even a thing” (Luttrell 2014). Luttrell’s praise of this scene, however, not only misses Oaken’s negative traits, but even translates them into problematic positives, so that any representation of homosexuality is understood in progressive terms. So, in claiming that Oaken “is friendly to his customers and generous with his assistance. He's a savvy businessman who understands economics (supply and demand, Kristoff), and he isn't afraid to stand up for himself when Kristoff calls him a crook” (2014), Luttrell interprets negative characterization as praise. Oaken may have a friendly manner, but he is not generous, and his understanding of economics is applied to exploiting his potentially endangered customers Kristoff and Anna. Kristoff explains that he only has ten of an unspecified currency, and asks Oaken to “help me out”. Ten, Oaken replies, will get Kristoff some carrots but not also the requested rope and ice pick, “and no more”. The scene’s structure of shot/reverse shot here frequently places the back of Oaken’s head and shoulders in the frame, whilst the reverse, looking from Anna and Kristoff’s side of the counter, is composed to align these characters’ and the spectator’s view more directly. The spectator is thereby encouraged to see the two sides of the exchange from very different subjective positions. This scopic regime reaches its logical conclusion when Olaf responds aggressively to Kristoff’s accusation that he is “a crook”. Olaf stands from his diminutive seated position behind the counter, looming up in a point-of-view shot aligned to Kristoff (Fig.4), emphasizing the spectator’s intended point of identification and the indented subject of now violent ‘Otherness’.

Fig.4
Moreover, this brief act of violence operates within the context of Steven Neale’s argument that “male homosexuality is constantly present as an undercurrent, as a potentially troubling aspect of many films and genres, but one that is dealt with obliquely, symptomatically, and that has to be repressed” (1993: 19). Olaf’s violence distracts attention from a potentially homosexual spectacle towards more socially accepted pro-active combative heterosexual masculinity. This process involves the application of Freudian disavowal, so that “the erotic elements involved in the relations between the spectator and the male image have constantly to be repressed and disavowed” (Neale 1993: 19). Visually, therefore, Oaken is represented in far less erotic terms than Elsa. He grins inanely, is somewhat portly with spindly legs, and walks with an ungainly shuffle. Narratively, Oaken’s suppression of homosexuality into violent heterosexuality extends into further forms of disavowal. He throws Kristoff into the outside snow with a cheery “bye bye” and a wave, signifying Luttrell’s understanding of his friendliness, and thereby repressing the violence of the act. When both Anna and Kristoff first enter his trading post his same friendly manner chimes, in the repeated and comical melodious tone, “Big summer blowout?”, offering them swimsuits and suntan lotion, disavowing the cataclysmic winter that Elsa’s homosexual unconscious has unleashed.

Two further elements limit the positive implications of Oaken’s brief homosexual coding. The first is his accent. Aside from some ambassadors to Elsa’s court who have explicit English, Irish and French accents, the film’s human characters all have American accents of one type or another. Oaken, however, has a Scandinavian accent, voiced by an American actor, which is coded for comedy, and more specifically for laughing-at than laughing-with. He is thereby differentiated into ‘Otherness’. His outsider status is also emphasized by his geographical location. All but one of the film’s other human characters are either foreigners who travel to Elsa’s court by ship, or locals who live in the town/castle of Arendelle. Because Elsa travels into the wilderness to ‘out’ herself, Oaken’s rural location might similarly tie him to homosexuality. But, given his comedic accent, his mean-spiritedness and his violent disavowals, Oaken’s outsider status identifies him as negatively ‘Other’ in a way that is not imposed upon Elsa, who is allowed to return to the heterosexual world of Arendelle once she has learned to control her own homosexuality.

Kristoff, too, is an inhabitant of the rural outsider world, and also has the potential for a gay reading. The potentially homosexual space outside Arendelle is introduced, in the film’s opening scene, through a group of burly, bearded ice gatherers, all of whom are male. The
child Kristoff is affiliated with this group, though at its margins, ineffectively copying their grappling of ice blocks, and following them, when they depart on a large ice-laden sledge, alone on his own very small sledge. None of the ice-gatherers is suggested to be his father. He certainly has no mother present and is, indeed, soon adopted by the trolls.

His potential homosexuality, or at least his absence of traditional heterosexuality, is sung of by these trolls, who refer to “his thing with the reindeer that’s a little outside of nature’s laws”. The visual codings of this inter-species relationship are similarly sexual, Sven the reindeer swallowing a phallic carrot (to be discussed later) whole before regurgitating it, heavy with dripping saliva, for Kristoff to break in two and share (Fig.5). This bestial sharing of bodily fluids occurs, however, within the heterosexual, or at least closeted, space of Arendelle, before Kristoff and Sven enter the story proper. Kristoff is thereby coded as someone, like Elsa, who inhabits both rural homosexuality and urban heterosexuality.

Fig.5

Kristoff’s sexuality can therefore be manipulated, so that when he takes Anna to the trolls for life-saving help they are overjoyed that he has “brought a girl”, and automatically prepare for a wedding despite the fact that Kristoff’s rural ways and bestial relations mean that, as they repeatedly sing, he’s “a bit of a fixer-upper”. The trolls’ song establishes that Kristoff’s sexuality operates both within the context of a Freudian understanding of homosexuality, and that such a context can be overcome. In the song’s bridge they address Anna in the following terms:
We’re not saying you can change him
‘Cause people don’t really change.
We’re only saying that love’s a force that’s powerful and strange.
People make bad choices if they’re mad or scared or stressed
But throw a little love their way, and you’ll bring out their best!

Freud’s assertion that everyone is in part bisexual is suggested in this interplay between change and choices. Kristoff’s ambiguous sexuality is therefore a “bad choice” caused by the absence of ‘normal’ (in the context of the film’s geographical distinctions, urban) socialization into heterosexuality, within a Freudian context. The unconscious element of Kristoff’s failure to develop his heterosexuality is emphasized by the trolls’ claim that his “bad choices” are caused not only by being “scared or stressed” but by being “mad”. Their solution to this, whilst it will not “change him” in terms of his inherent and inevitable Freudian bisexuality, is to “throw a little love [his] way” (my emphasis), actively socializing his dormant heterosexuality and thereby “bring[ing] out [his] best”. Kristoff will then be ‘fixed’ through heterosexual union with Anna, so that the trolls sing “we know what to do. The way to fix up this fixer-upper is to fix him up with you [Anna]”. His ambiguous sexuality is thereby eventually tamed into heterosexuality through his relationship with Anna, consummated with a kiss, in the film’s traditional couple-forming resolution, in urban, heterosexual Arendelle.

The film’s final inhabitant of the external homosexual world outside Arendelle, and indeed, creation of Elsa’s unconscious during the ecstatic release of her outing, is the snowman Olaf (Josh Gad). His gay coding is somewhat problematic; he does not feature in the specific criticisms of the religious right. Explicit commentary about his potential homosexuality is limited to Debra Rienstra’s observation (which perhaps suggests why the homophile left might not focus on this character) that “I was a little embarrassed by him because he seemed to conform to the ‘sassy gay friend’ trope, which I feel is disrespectful to gay men” (2013). Olaf’s voice tone and mannerisms fit in with this characterization, as do occasional comments such as “let’s go kiss Hans!”, which address either direct homosexual desire or at the least a vicarious desire towards a man through a female friend.
But the film text includes numerous other subtle messages about Olaf’s sexuality that draw on more sophisticated psychoanalytic themes. The first of these concerns disavowal, although in a more complex manner than relates to Oaken. In the first instance, disavowal in relation to Olaf actually helps establish his homosexuality. For Freud, male homosexuality is caused by an overly sexualized attachment to the mother and a disavowal of both sexual difference and castration anxiety by refusing to accept that the mother has no penis. All bodies, for the Freudian homosexual, are therefore male (Hatt and Klonk 2006: 180). Freud gave some interesting examples of this in relation to art, arguing that Leonardo da Vinci’s female paintings are manifestations of his unconscious refusal to accept sexual difference. The ambivalent smile of the *Mona Lisa* invokes the infant Leonardo’s “eroticized experience of the mother’s face, but simultaneously pacifies this desire by representing the woman as detached, uninvolved in any kind of sexualized intimacy” (Hatt and Klonk 2006: 181).

Freud’s analysis of da Vinci’s *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist* (Fig.6) is most useful, however, in terms of Olaf’s gay coding. The two adult faces and bodies in this drawing are indistinct in terms of sexual difference. Indeed, Freud points out, their two heads seem to sprout from the same single amorphous body (1953: 107). This incoherent un-gendered body is similar to Olaf’s, whose bodily unity is frequently under threat. On first meeting Anna and Kristoff his head is kicked off and thrown around like a ball. When it is set upside down back onto his body the camera shows his inverted point-of-view (Fig.7). As this trio are thrown out of Elsa’s ice castle by the marshmallow snow beast, Olaf’s body parts drop beside his colleagues one by one. In shouting “look out for my butt!” Olaf focuses on a body part associated with homosexuality. When he puts these parts back together he does so incorrectly (Fig.8), commenting, as he runs from the snow beast, “man am I out of shape!”
Like the Saint Anne/John hybrid, Olaf’s gender is ambiguous. He is voiced by a man, but Olaf’s male coding via the locus of da Vinci’s homosexual obsession, the penis, is portrayed ambiguously. Within the conventions of an animated non-human character Olaf’s actual genitals are not shown at any point. Heterosexual Prince Hans’ ample bulge in tight Napoleonic trousers serves as a contrast (Fig.9). But Olaf is clearly aware of at least one of the penis’ functions, commenting that he loves various colours of snow except for yellow. And his carrot nose is linked to the phallus through both narrative and imagery, and in both instances his possession of this phallic carrot nose is threatened.
Narratively, Olaf’s possession of the phallic nose is bestowed by Anna, who produces the carrot from a bag of Sven’s food which Kristoff has already been shown sharing (Fig. 5), and which was the only product that Oaken was willing to let Kristoff have for his limited funds. This nose is thereby immediately linked with the bestial sharing of bodily fluids between Sven and Kristoff, and is potentially also linked to an offering from Oaken. Sven continually attempts to eat this food/penis/nose, an act first interpreted by Olaf, within the contexts of Kristoff’s bestial relationship and of oral sex, as an attempt to “kiss my nose”. Sven does eventually manage to swallow this nose, but as with his earlier moment with Kristoff, regurgitates it. This time, rather than sharing the carrot as food, it is bestowed once more upon Olaf as a nose.

Moreover, when Anna first bestows this phallic gift she does so through an act of penetration, thrusting it into Olaf’s head with an ambiguous response somewhere between pain and pleasure; “head rush!” The initial penetration is too deep, however, and although Olaf lovingly caresses the tiny protrusion from his face (Fig. 10) Anna strikes a blow from behind to resize the nose to more acceptable proportions (Fig. 11), which leads Olaf to claim “I love it even more.” This phallic nose is therefore bestowed and resized by Anna and then threatened and re-bestowed by Sven. During his “out of shape” run from the snow beast the nose is one of his misplaced body parts (Fig. 8), and when Olaf begins to melt by Anna’s fire his phallic nose is the first body part to fall (Fig. 12). Olaf’s sexual difference is therefore highly ambiguous, threatened, and bestowed from without.
It is also, most importantly, something inscribed into the narrative in a particular manner in which disavowal and emasculation are pleasurable both for the character and for the audience. In both cases this is a form of masochism which reinforces Olaf’s homosexuality and the audience’s pleasurable resolution of Olaf’s threat to sexual difference. Indeed, Olaf’s merry masochism extends and links sexual difference to a disavowal of death. When he walks into a large horizontally positioned icicle Olaf cheerily says “Oh look at that, I’ve been impaled!” (Fig.13), linking passive homosexuality with a bemused acceptance of a physical threat to his life. Freud’s link between homosexuality and bodily incoherence is again
emphasized in the way that Olaf’s abdomen and legs continue to walk forwards when he is impaled, so that they fall off. The happily impaled Olaf is therefore shown without a complete body. Kristoff’s ambiguous, alterable sexuality is contrasted with Olaf’s joyful penetration, through a threat of icicle penetration which Kristoff manages to narrowly resist (Fig.14). The shot of this threat, moreover, is shown in close-up, so that Kristoff’s body, coherent or otherwise, is not open to display. This threat to his heterosexuality is also targeted against the part of Olaf coded as phallic, the nose. Anna, travelling with Olaf and Kristoff is not threatened with penetration. Olaf’s pleasurable penetration, quite literally, stages Freud’s pleasure of unpleasure (1955), and closely links this unpleasure to a passive form of sexuality.
Olaf’s pleasure in unpleasure is most evident in his musical number, however. Having never experienced the summer, he fantasizes about it, joyously looking forward to “doing whatever snow does in summer”. His cheery repression of the summer’s threat to his life is exemplified in the broken rhyming couplet “Winter’s a good time to stay in and cuddle, but put me in summer and I’ll be a … happy snowman!” accompanied by him smilingly leaping over the corpse and grave that is his potential puddle. The visual link between Olaf and the puddle is stressed through the reflected expression of, for once, uncertainty on the snowman’s face as he pauses before the couplet’s suggested rhyming “puddle” (Fig.15), and the subsequent resolution of this threat via the leap over it with the cry of “happy snowman!” (Fig.16). A puddle, moreover, is the logical conclusion of his already established bodily incoherence, again linking masochism and a Freudian disavowal of sexual difference. And, the fact that Olaf’s song wants to rhyme “puddle” with “cuddle” suggests that part of his unconscious is aware of the summer’s danger. The broken rhyme therefore acts as a form of parapraxis, like a Freudian slip, within the context of Freud’s contention that “one is justified in inferring from [parapraxes] the presence of restrained or repressed impulses and intentions” (1978: 46-7).
The most significant element of this masochism, however, is the way it echoes a fundamental ideological element of film’s pleasurable affect on audiences. Not only is this a wilful disavowal on Olaf’s part, but it represents a fundamental element of Freud’s understanding of masochism relating to the *fort/da* game. This is based on observations Freud made of his toddler grandson playing with a cotton reel which he repeatedly cast away with a cry of ‘fort’ (meaning ‘there’), before winding it back up with a cry of ‘da’ (meaning ‘here’). Freud interpreted this game as a metaphor for the child’s separation from its mother. The child could not really dictate when it had access to her, and so created a ritual in which this access could be allegorized. Crucially, for Michele Aaron, “[w]hat Freud suggests is that the pleasure of recovery is not only experienced through the pain of loss, but is actually increased by it” (2007: 54), so that the unpleasure of non-access to the mother, and the pleasure of access, were both equally enjoyable at the allegorical level. The temporary unpleasure of the former is worth the cathartic resolution of the latter.

The significance of the *fort/da* game to post-structuralist film theory has been twofold. Firstly, it contributes to an understanding of the masochistic relationship between those inevitable moments in cinema which temporarily reveal the cinematic apparatus, demonstrating to the audience that their fantasy of ostensibly transcendent creativity is merely an illusion, and the subsequent powerful cinematic techniques that *suture* over this revelation, restoring an apparently seamless un-authored unfolding. Steven Heath argues that this process is so fundamental to film’s “constant process of a phasing-in of vision [and] the
pleasure of that process” (1985: 514), that this masochistic “drama of vision becomes a constant reflexive fascination in films” (1985: 514, original emphasis). Filmmakers unconsciously inscribe the ideological oscillation between alienating grammatical incoherence and its cathartic resolution into narrative form. Secondly, the *fort/da* game has contributed to an understanding of narrative as a movement from the equilibrium-breaking *fort* of a threat to the story’s characters, to the resolution of this threat in the *da* of the narrative’s conclusion. The two elements are explicitly combined in cinema, “the pleasure of [the] process—movement and fixity and movement again, from fragment … to totality (the jubilation of the final image)” (1985: 514) contributing to the pleasure of the narrative drama’s parallel arc from threat to resolution. And, as is crucial to the masochistic logic of the *fort/da* game, “the pleasure of recovery is not only experienced through the pain of loss, but is actually increased by it” (Aaron 2007: 54). Indeed, once the *da* of narrative equilibrium is restored the story quickly ends.

Olaf represents these twin processes allegorically *writ large*. He joyously sings about the prospect of his own death, and actively contributes towards a narrative resolution that will (at least logically) ensure it. Indeed, extending Olaf’s masochism towards a fantasy about his own death suggests one of the answers to the question that Freud posed in relation to the *fort/da* game, the problem of accounting for “the observed fact that the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending” (1955: 15-16). The teleological logic of this repetitive staging of unpleasure was, for Freud, the death drive or *thanatos*, “an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things – the inorganic state from which life originally emerged” (1955: 36, original emphasis). Olaf demonstrates this thanatic logic, extending a disavowal of sexual difference to a pleasurable disavowal of death. In seeing his reflected self in the puddle which his parapractic unconscious knows is his inevitable fate, when summer returns, Olaf glimpses his incoherent body’s “earlier state of things” (Freud 1955: 36, original emphasis)⁶.

Both because this is a Disney movie necessitating a happy ending, and because this pleasurable unpleasure needs to be cathartically resolved within the logic of the *fort/da* game, Elsa eventually bestows a small snow cloud on Olaf so that he can live on in the restored summer. But *Frozen* takes pleasure from inscribing this process into narrative form. As Kristoff says, when he first hears Olaf’s masochistic fantasy about summer, “somebody’s
gotta tell him”. The same is true with cinema – somebody (the filmmakers) has/have to reveal the medium’s masochism, and indeed has/have to inscribe this revelation into the pleasure of unpleasure and the subsequent cathartic resolution of that revelation’s threat. So, just as Olaf is able to survive and enjoy his unpleasure, so too is the cinematic spectator. Both stage and enjoy the masochistic dramas of vision and of narrative.

These various gay codings serve to characterize homosexuality within different negative conventions; a greedy, comedic outsider, an ambiguous potential heterosexual convert, a sexualized ‘lipstick’ lesbian, a masochistic vicariously-sexual ‘gay best friend’. The gender differentiation of these stereotypes reinforce traditional binaries based upon woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 1993: 116, original emphasis) and the threat of “male homosexuality [which] is constantly present as an undercurrent, as a potentially troubling aspect of many films and genres, but one that is dealt with obliquely, symptomatically, and that has to be repressed” (Neale 1993: 19). Moreover, Frozen’s masochistic celebration of the pleasure of unpleasure thematises realist cinema’s central ontological ideological project, inscribing spectators into “the pleasure of [the] process—movement and fixity and movement again, from fragment […] to totality (the jubilation of the final image)” (Heath 1985: 514) by narrativising the principle that the “drama of vision becomes a constant reflexive fascination in films” (1985: 514, original emphasis).

Notes

1 The extent to which such a challenge to patriarchy might make the filmmakers “feel good about themselves” (Greydanus 2014) is perhaps demonstrated in Frozen’s songwriter Kristen Anderson-Lopez’s comment that director “Jennifer Lee and I could put in it [sic] because we’re both Park Slope moms. We both went through the ’90s. We took the women's studies courses, and I knew I wouldn't be able to push my kids on the swing at the playground if I had written a movie where the girl wore the puffy dress and was saved not by anything active she did but by being beautiful enough to be kissed by a prince” (Gross 2014).
More accurately there are two manifestations of Elsa’s id. The second, the larger and more aggressive marshmallow snowman, shares with Oaken a propensity for disavowing violence. He, too, has a scene in which his ‘normal’ masculinity is questioned, when he places Elsa’s cast off tiara on his head after the film’s end credits.

The two characters coded as potential transgressors of heterosexuality, Kristoff and Sven, tilt their heads in an attempt to share Olaf’s incoherent body’s perspective. Heterosexual Anna makes no such attempt. Kristoff and Sven observe passively, while Anna actively restores a ‘corrected’ perspective by repositioning Olaf’s head.

This is the second scene in the film in which characters are thrown into the snow, following on from Oaken’s tossing of Kristoff (pun intended). Both are violent expulsions from homosexually coded spaces by homosexually coded characters.

For Terry Eagleton, “[f]ort-da is perhaps the shortest story we can imagine: an object is lost, and then recovered. But even the most complex narratives can be read as variants on this model. […]Narrative is a source of consolation” (2008: 160-1).

The puddle, moreover, is roughly shaped like Olaf’s body, with a smaller protrusion positioned like a head. A much smaller puddle is positioned close by, where the phallic nose might be, but during the fort of Olaf’s recognition that the puddle is the logical conclusion of both his bodily incoherence and of his masochistic fantasy the puddle nose is detached (Fig.15). Once Olaf leaps over the puddle, substituting “happy snowman” for that which rhymes with “cuddle”, his body conceals the upper part of the puddle, hiding the castration (Fig.16).


