Media Presentations

Beautiful Perverts and the Brave World of Nan Goldin

Agnieszka Kłos

Nan Goldin loses her language in the moment of closest people's deaths. Suddenly she quits her way of living and starts traveling. She takes many pictures, intensively; lively, one might say, taking under consideration multitude of funerals she documented. She tries to remember every detail of her life and others'. Streets, houses, flats, beds, hotel rooms: people, many and more of the closest and accidental people. Evenings, many last evenings. She usually takes pictures at night. The camera becomes her defensive tool and extension of her senses. It is as indispensable as hand and eye – the hand being, according to Barthes, the intermediary in man's contact with death, and the eye that teaches us to be humble in contact with technique. She takes pictures regardless of conditions, image sharpness, or object visibility. In a dynamic, skilful, obsessive way she becomes death's agent. She is thus able to sustain herself and her pictures in the state of impossible density, a tension comparable only to sexual, erotic tension: the tension of man's life.

Goldin begins her journey to art in the moment of loss, as writing down and documenting the world becomes her obsession and driving force, the determinant of her style. Today we speak of 'Goldin look', classic already. The risky field of her interest, initially reserved for deviants, homeless and social outcasts, undergoes a gradual change from documentary to prestigious galleries. With her camera Goldin effectuates the shift of values, very characteristic of postwar photography in general. Named a new and ever young art, photography had to prove a lot – among other things that it is real art. Documentary pictures had to go the risky and hard way of challenging the canons – from newspaper illustrations to gallery objects of art. Goldin accompanied them, traveling herself from Frank's style snapshots to fashion magazines.

«I am a natural born feminist», Goldin states, sharply and resolutely, at the beginning of her artistic journey. She undermines social order and trespasses areas thought to be sacred, immaculate or taboo. She takes pictures of men making love, dressing up as women, and achieves real transgression in art. Nothing similar existed before in art or in art galleries.

Usually we describe an amateur as an immature artist – Barthes says – someone unable or unwilling to climb to the heights of professionalism. In the field of photography though it seems to be to the contrary: the amateur makes professional, because he is closest to the noema of photography. From the

moment Goldin enters the field of the amateur she is inside family photography, embodying banality, pop, the very essence of family album. She takes pictures of people with whom she is the most familiar in their warmest, most intimate moments: accompanying, caressing, getting closer. In my opinion Goldin's power emerges from her ability to include the whole of the situation at one time, so that we do not have to wonder what has happened before the picture was taken, or what happened after this moment. Her record is perfect, showing the most important, dense, signifying, emotionally fertile moment: the photo of ejaculation. Goldin catches ejaculations in art. Her photography is like a wound unable to heal, to scar over; every picture opening and irritating it anew. The wound exists despite the banality of image.

Goldin is the court photographer of gay men and drag queens (DQ). Seeing her giant canvases for the first time felt like being in the hall with Rubens, Velasquez, Caravaggio works. I wasn't struck by the scale of these pictures, but rather by the light they emanated – troubling, vibrant, lively light that seduces and makes one return to her photos again and again. The spectator wants to come closer, to stay in the warmth of the photos' light; to take part in royal weddings, the births of new dynasties; baths, car repairs, eating, suffering of traveling. Gloom, the melancholic light of Goldin's works catches us. This is the sacrum of her art.

Goldin takes light out of her models like Caravaggio did. Admiration, love and desire towards the models are the striking feature of their art. Through their portraits Goldin and Caravaggio caressed models who in real everyday life were their family and friends.

Goldin creates a new mythology of everyday life by portraying gay men, lesbians and transvestites. She does not portrait in fact, she lives with the people – lives like gay men, lesbians, transvestites. The whole marginalized group becomes her own dysfunctional family, her tribe, her clan. It challenges Goldin's emotions and our as we watch.

Goldin's works are icons, reflections in mirrors, water and other people. Motive of fluids surrounding man or pouring out of him accompanies her from the beginning: images of ejaculations, tears, urine, saliva, bath, blood, sweat, slime covering the newborn man. Goldin is very close to life, her early works made in haste, voraciously. She explains it as an enormous need of remembering life, world, people, last evening. These pictures stay in our mind, because they are hot, taken in hottest of moments.

Her photos are full of basic defects and mistakes, seen today as obvious features of her style. These mistakes are plagiarized superficially and in a grotesque way by fashion magazines.

Goldin's chronicle is the precise record of her life. As she repeats: «My pictures are not good, not professional, they are

nothing close to a masterpiece or genius. They matter only in cycles, lines, passages, in the increasing rhythm of family album, accompanied by entertaining music». This is how Ballad of Sexual Dependency was born.

Goldin's photos discover the human body. I have never before seen such intensity of carnality. Her cadres have magical influence; they lure the spectator, seduce him, as if photographed bodies glow only for him. Body's most usual ornament is tattoo or the other body. Not each of them is beautiful in a classical sense. Goldin accompanies friends of her youth, following them step by step. On the last pictures of them we see old bodies: exhausted, ill, beaten, mutilated. Goldin portrays herself battered or mutilated as well, recording her image in most intimate moments. Her works make all the categories invalid, paradoxically, because we cannot find any better example of gender euphoria in art. Although she presents so many clans, masked and costumed bodies, her work does not have political context, as critics would argue, but it represents rather normal everyday experiences of people of her closest circle. It is not a manifesto or feminist program, although Goldin repeatedly highlights her connection with this category, but the photo diary of certain epochs, fusing private and professional sphere.

She discovers and uncovers the most shameful and hidden experiences, turning them into myth, symbol, returning them to the world. Somehow she returns the dignity and uniqueness of her friends. With this diary she begins the revolution in understanding art. In 1950s and 1960s art belonged to men. Goldin's works undermine for the first time ritual, codex, law according to which one doesn't address publicly some topics and doesn't expose certain places. America in 1950s was the reserve of codified behaviors, constructed myth where place for women and home affairs were missing. Goldin has broken this binary opposition of private and public. Her pictures allow, highlight and honor everything that is different, hidden, intimate or mutilated. In this sense her art is religious. Goldin builds pietas.

Medium becomes transparent. Goldin tends to exclude herself from her pictures, to disappear from this love exchange: «Me and this picture, or me and them, the characters I eventually recognize as my people». Every picture is titled, allowing us to meet characters personally and see the most important moments of their lives. Sometimes the moments of their deaths, too. Her diary – or diaries, photographic and written – are broadened as the time passes with more universal experiences.

Goldin struggles for absolute truth and honesty. Honesty is not only the moral category of her works, the way of representing the reality, but also an element of her style. Pictures may be defected, moved, blurred, badly composed, yet they certify the facts: things that happened, without pose or any

preparation.

Goldin works record – as precisely as it is possible – times that due to AIDS emergence and bloom we call 'tempestuous', the recent past of 1980s. But it all began in 1960s, in Washington suburbs, where Nancy Goldin was born into a family of Jewish intellectuals with average incomes. Timid Nan, dreaming of becoming a psychoanalyst, was terrified of her peers. In 1965 her talented elder sister committed suicide by laying herself on the railway tracks. A week after, Nan was raped by an aged neighbor. Soon after she ran away from home for the first time and was sent to a shelter. She was fleeing regularly. Finally Nan, already aware of her drive toward women, joined group of homeless teenagers with whom she lived in squatted house. During this period of establishing and consolidating her first family she was autistic and depressed, taking pictures in order to overcome her fear of people. Realizing she remembered only the eyes of her late sister, and wanting to save others from death, she starts recording every detail of the lives of herself and seven other androgynous, artsy teenagers: her family. One of them, David Armstrong, became her guide in the world of DQ and introduced her into gay life and the first secret DQ clubs. He was also first to conquer New York. In their art this time was devoted to experiment. Every evening friends made fashion shows, dressed up in the style of famous stars of the 1940s and 1950s. Goldin took pictures *a la* Cecil Beaton, early Newton, Horst, Bourdin. She is fascinated by old movies' aesthetics and the fashion world. She also begins to feel the blurring of differences between sexes.

Early works of Goldin mimic Vogue photos: full of life, emotion and naked bodies. They are also loaded with truth. Being raw, documentary-like, they are situated in more intimate contexts. In this regard her early art is compared to Arbus and Clark's pictures. They miss Clarks' neorealism, but we see in them a determination to catch the moment.

In mid-1970s, influenced by the environment of her squat, Goldin enrolled in the school of Modern Art Museum in Boston. She says she then took pictures worse then ever, but started using wide lenses and taking color pictures – by chance, as she states, because she accidentally put in color film instead of usual black and white. Taught by DQ, allowed into their world, she documented their births in front of the mirror, their maquillage ceremonies, beauty contests and clubbing. This is when 'Goldin look' came into being. Color and flash made her style. Goldin, never parting with her camera, does not take pictures except by night, in night clubs, in artificial light. Due to this her photos are infused with mysterious, intriguing, dense red glow. Goldin works in Cibachrome technique, developing the slides, and that fills her pictures with sensual, vibrant, flash-lighted color of erotic value.

DQ and gay culture allowed her to record the sensual

decadence of the *demi-monde*, frivolity and existence beyond the logics of sex and convention. She approached this world with care and devotion. Many years later she said that they were the only real winners in sex wars, because they left the battlefield.

Boston school introduced into the art junk, glamour, and aggressive fortuitousness of the pictures. This school consisted of David Armstrong, diCorcia, Pierson. The latter was the author of melancholic snapshot portraits of men. Goldin was the only woman in this group. «My work takes root in snapshots», she said, many years after. This is the method of photography that emerges from love. People make snapshots because they love, because they want to remember others, times, places. Snapshots create history by recording it.

In 1978, she went to London to discover The Clash and The Sex Pistols. She dwelled in squats, taking pictures of skinheads. Her photos of that period reflect its raw darkness. After she came back from London, she followed David Armstrong and his lover Bruce Balboni to New York. Balboni proposed that Goldin present her photos in the form of slide show. It was cheap and she was all for it. During one of Bruce's shows, Goldin met the model and muse of artists Cookie Mueller, whom she would be portraying for thirteen years of their friendship. Goldin worked at the bar in the nightclub. She and her friends entered the speedway of drugs and alcohol. Nan records every moment – in order to remember what she did, and with whom. She makes unique pictures of men and women who do not know sex roles difference; people who live at night, in nightclubs and at the parties.

She started presenting her work in the form of a slide show, first at her own home then in avantgarde clubs. The number of pictures growing, Goldin arranged them in longer sequences, like a director working on the movie. Slides are so numerous she had to carry them in bags. They grow in number and her fame grows along with them. Goldin thinks that the beauty of her pictures lies in the number, not the quality of the slides. The showing of Ballad of Sexual Dependence takes 45 minutes. Goldin recalls: «People don't understand now how radical Ballad was. Between 1986 and 1987, when it was published as the album, I traveled around the world presenting the slides myself. Male photographers hated this work. They did everything to trouble me and make my life miserable, especially in USA. Once I was even beaten during the conference in Baltimore». The slide collection was recognized and named as a phenomenon in Europe, then in America.

Ballad is the story of gender roles, relationship bonds and women's power, co-dependency and autonomy in relationships. It contains bits of Goldin's and her friends' lives, and of their sexual development. History begins with women's portraits in mirrors and baths, accompanied with the Hit the Girl, Kiss the Girl song.

Women enter into relationships that seem happy at the first glance. In the second part of the show we hear Don't Give Me Away and see women battered, humiliated, down; prostitutes and children dressed up like grown-ups. The next sequences show married couples and great biological cycles: childbirths, ceremonies of life. The next part is devoted to men with their hobbies, muscles, beer and cars. This sequence is reminiscent of predators, presented to suggestive jungle music. It shows men fighting and mutilating their partners, drinking and sniffing drugs. Then we move to night bars where men are joined by women. Bars and roadside joints are the only space of short reconciliation between sexes. Goldin thinks the compromise in men-women relations is impossible, because every sex comes from a totally different space. In next parts of Ballad we see the hell of drugs and drinking, fast car driving, trains, couples in different constellations, relationships of deep dependence. The most common topic is masturbation. In her Ballad Goldin broke every taboo. She let the audience look at men and women masturbating, reaching satisfaction in their own way. These slides met with loudest objection. Goldin also shows openly the mutilated bodies of women: scars as souvenirs from their lovers, black eyes, cuts that become visual oxymorons. She documented labor wounds, heart-shaped bruises, love bites. The show ends with empty beds, twin graves and skeletons hugging somewhere in Mexico.

Goldin's 'heroin chic' marks mainly portraits of women. Most of such pictures represent women in mirrors or while bathing. Water is very important scenery for Goldin. She portrayed her models in bathrooms and under the shower. Water, besides possessing sexual meaning, lets us approach the essence of purification, rest, transgression and beginning of the new life. The most important Goldin retrospective was entitled I'll Be Your Mirror.

Goldin became famous, but her personal life was destroyed. Pictures of this period show a high-voltage relationship with a quick-tempered and brutal man who beat her. She calls this experience 'the crazy triangle': drugs, her lover, and herself. In 1984 she made her most shocking self-portrait, entitled Nan After Being Battered. After a month-long hospitalization and treatment for her severely wounded left eye she created the series of self-portraits. They illustrate one of modern art's theories, describing a new dimension of the erotic in visual arts. It is the representation of man's power over woman with elements of force, brutality, even a rape. This aspect of new aesthetics entered also advertising. But Goldin was first to attempt to smuggle it into the world of art.

Thinking of Goldin's art we usually associate it with the AIDS explosion in USA and Europe. Goldin herself divides her life into two periods: careless freedom before AIDS, and post-AIDS emptiness. The disease, perceived in 1980 as 'homosexuals'

cancer', took most of her famous family. Goldin was very busy with traveling abroad, working on Ballad, saving her relationship with Brian, and with her own drug addiction. She was pulled out of her narcotic dream by the death of her oldest friends. Today Goldin thinks herself a survivor of catastrophe. Cookie Mueller's death and endless narcotic dream paradoxically saved Goldin's life. She undertook for the first time serious treatment for alcoholic addiction and went through detox. For the first time in her life she discovered in a therapeutic sense – the light. Natural daylight became her companion. She realized she could not live without her camera, that her work is her life. She said, «I believe one can create only on the basis of one's experiences and tell stories only about one's tribe».

Staying in the detox clinic, she commenced the process of returning to life, creating her first works in daylight. The change in Goldin's style is really amazing: she once avoided light: according to her own words, she hadn't had the idea that sun existed.

After the first part of detox, Goldin took pictures similar to Cindy Sherman's works: artificial, posed self-portraits. We can see – fearful, unmasked – Goldin's face, as well as sacral signs, religious pictures and crosses in hospital rooms.

After leaving the hospital, Goldin obtained a prestigious award. The DAAD scholarship enabled her to move to Berlin. There she made her most subtle, most beautiful portraits of her lover and companion, young Siobhan. Most of them depict the girl in bed or under the shower. This period is very important in Goldin's art, representing, with once-unknown openness, the dynamics of living with a woman. She establishes new perspective in feminist and lesbian art. Somehow those pictures document the gender euphoria.

Nan Goldin belongs to the city myth of 1980s; she guides us through the underworld of hell and shows us the openly chemical highs of her generation, as well as the landscape after AIDS. But the landscapes of the last period are made of endless spaces and lots of water. She shows people and objects on a background of pink light. In the last works she focuses on most intimate moments of her friends' life, shows their family interiors, baths, childbirths, the first steps of babies.

Famed as the dark lady of photography, Goldin walked out of the darkness. In her last works from France, Switzerland and Italy one can see soft, warm light, friends eating and laughing. Her style is now constituted by a narrowing of her circle of models, narrowing of the image to one interior and one couple. Goldin is telling the history of the world: of first parents and their children. She focuses on everyday proceedings and home affairs. Her pictures are soft, friendly, accessible. They seem more and more universal. Nan Goldin is resting.

Translated from Polish by Agnieszka Weseli.

Biographical Note

Agnieszka Kłos is a specialist in the literature and art theory and is currently working on doctoral thesis. She is a co-founder and a lecturer of the Gender Studies in Wroclaw and the initiator of numerous projects and events, for example the Warsaw ghetto project to be held in 2006. She is the author of many installations, artworks, photos and the popular art weblog, and has participated in various conferences, as well as literature and other workshops and art exhibitions. Agnieszka is the winner of numerous literature contests, and works as a writer, a reporter, and an art critic.

Intersexuality – In the 'I' of the Norm?: Queer Field Notes from Eugenides' Middlesex

Anne Koch-Rein

This paper by Anne Koch-Rein is taken from a previous publication in: Haschemi Yekani, Elahe/Michaelis, Beatrice (eds.). *Quer durch die Geisteswissenschaften. Perspektiven der Queer Theory*. Berlin: Querverlag, 2005.

Over the course of the last ten years, interest and anxiety around transgendered, posthuman, disabled, queer embodiment and relentless intersex activism have lent intersexuality an unprecedented amount of both mainstream media and academic attention. Yet with all this recent proliferating production of discourse, there seems to have been comparatively little scholarship on issues of cultural representation so far, which is all the more unfortunate, given the history of complicity of academic discourse in the very mobilization and perpetuation of the figure of the mythic and metaphoric hermaphrodite[1].

Against this backdrop, I examine the function and representation of intersexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides' novel Middlesex[2] from an intersectional perspective of both disability[3] and queer studies. In tracing how Middlesex tries to occupy a narrative place in the 'I' of the norm, I hope to demonstrate the way queer critiques of naturalized gender norms and a social model of disability are toyed with in the novel, yet ultimately contained.

Robert McRuer argues for a close analytic relationship between queer and disability studies, because «the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness» (89). The intersectionality of disability and queerness (or compulsory able-bodiedness and heteronormativity) is perhaps nowhere more clear than in the case of intersexuality. There is a striking parallel between «the concept of disability» that «unites a highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal» (Garland-Thomson 24) and the term intersexuality covering «a group of patients with such a wide ranging assortment of sex differentiation diagnoses» (Turner

[1] This is a shorthand for a figure that is to be found in classical myths from the origin of love in Plato's Symposium to Ovid's Hermaphroditus, as a metaphor of the union of opposites in Jungian psychology, as an androgynous archetype of Renaissance wholeness, but also in the pathologizing version of exoticized, freakish anomaly e.g. in Tod Browning's 1932 film Freaks. Classical-Greek myth or exceedingly rare modern 'freak', this figure is never an intersexed person next door.

[2] Cited in the text as MS.

[3] I aim to do so in the same spirit in which April Herndon applied disability ideas to fat embodiment, recognizing «disability as a socially-constructed phenomenon rather than a physical trait» (122).

458). As Sharon Preves explains: «Regardless of its particular manifestation or cause, most forms of physical sexual anatomy that vary from the norm are medically classified and treated as forms of intersexuality» (3). The only intersexual communality, in other words, is being considered 'abnormal' in terms of physical sexual characteristics. And even though intersexuality continues to be pathologized in medical discourse, it has become questionable (to say the least) whether there are any actual physical underlying 'impairments' that warrant medicalization[4]. Being hard or impossible to classify in a sexual binary[5] is ultimately all that constitutes intersexuality. This violation of «the culture's interest in enforcing dichotomous gender with dimorphic genitals» (Kessler 51) together with a «commitment to the concept of medical advancement» accounts for what Suzanne Kessler has called the «surgical momentum» (74) and medical teams' «standard practices for managing intersexuality, which rely ultimately on cultural understandings of gender» (12).

Postmodern times, as Alice Dreger notes, have enabled the emergence of intersexual autobiographic narratives in relatively large numbers. One of the reasons, she suggests, is an appreciation of the social construction of concepts like sexual identity and normality that has enabled intersexuals to object to their treatment as 'freaks' or 'problems' to be corrected and disappeared (170-73). She also relates them to postmodern attacks on the doctor-patient balance of power and compares them primarily to other «illness narratives»[6]. Yet even though stopping the non-consensual surgical enforcement of gender assignment is central as a concrete political goal, narratives of intersexuality are not restricted to the role of countering only medical authority and procedures. If one of the goals of disability rights activism is to «challenge the pathological narratives of their bodies presented in medicine and by the culture at large» (Mitchell and Snyder 8) the same is certainly true for intersexual activism[7]. Judith Butler points out very aptly in her most recent book that:

> «The struggle to rework the norms by which bodies are experienced is thus crucial not only to disability politics,

[4] This is an argument that is made on a general theoretical level (as it is here), but also in specific detail in response to the actual medical 'diagnosis' in question (and what kinds of treatment it entails) under the umbrella term intersexuality. Cf., for instance, Dreger's introduction.

[5] Even for bodies that are not viewed as 'ambiguous', this classification is a highly problematic equation of physical characteristics with gender attribution. Kessler puts it this way: «If intersexuality imparts any lesson, it is that gender is a responsibility and a burden – for those being categorized and those doing the categorizing» (132).

[6] Cf. Dreger, 170 Fn. 5.

[7] Cf. for instance www.isna.org, the Intersex Society of North America.

> but to the intersex and transgendered movements as they contest forcibly imposed ideals of what bodies ought to be like» (28).

In a broader cultural perspective, the emergence of intersexual voices thus is part of the increasing visibility of identities that defy, or at least have to go to great lengths to negotiate the laws of heteronormativity. Or as Julian, one of Sharon Preves' interviewees puts it: «We are walking carriers of the gender questioning disease» (125). And if transgender representations can be said to have attracted quite a lot of mainstream cultural as well as academic attention in this particular historical moment, the same is certainly true for the issue of intersexuality. Preves notes:

> «Within recent years, the topic of sexual ambiguity has been featured in national magazines, popular and educational television shows, and local news media. […] scholars have placed the topic of sexual ambiguity under the rubric of queer and gender studies. As a result, a new field of intersex studies, replete with its own canon […] is currently in formation» (149).

In other words, intersexuality is becoming an issue that you can go to town with, not only in the general media, but also academically. The emerging canon Preves alludes to is one dominated by more or less historical studies of medical and/or legal discourse, critical feminist biology, ethnographic and social science approaches. There seems to have been comparatively little scholarship on issues of cultural representation so far. But with cultural products around intersexuality visibly flourishing, the insight that medical practice is executing cultural demands[8], and Middlesex, a novel with and about an intersexual narrator, becoming an 'international bestseller', it's about time that cultural studies stepped up to bat. While it may seem that in one way or another queer attacks on heteronormativity and feminist thinking about the sexual binary have been addressing intersexuality from very early on – beyond the disciplinary focus I have presumed the bulk of the 'intersex canon' to have – there is a history of the hermaphrodite as myth and metaphor that needs to be considered, a particular history of objectification, in which academic discourse has (widely) participated. Stephanie Turner claims that

[8] This has been voiced by Kessler (and others): «[…] [I]f culture demands gender, physicians will produce it, and of course, when physicians produce it, the fact that gender is 'demanded' will be hidden from everyone» (75).

> «The mass media's representation of intersexuals via mythic images or statues contributes to the historicizing strategy […]. Although […] mythical contextualizing obscures the contemporary agenda of changing the medical treatment of intersexuals, it does provide for intersexuals a sense of belonging and for non-intersexuals an appreciation that this condition is neither particularly new nor all that uncommon» (Turner 475).

In light of the paradox of the long-standing presence of the hermaphrodite as myth and metaphor and the only very recent (re-)emergence of representations of intersexuals as existing individuals, I would like to argue quite the opposite. David Mitchell suggests that «disabled peoples' social invisibility has occurred in the wake of their perpetual circulation throughout literary history» (19), and this is even more true for intersexuals. The mythic, metaphoric, monstrous hermaphrodite for all intents and purposes seems to have – for the longest time – eclipsed the existence of intersexual bodies, and silenced their realities, while the bio-medical authorities have singled them out of, then defined them back (via the classification of 'pseudo-'), and more often than not literally tried to operate them back, into the sexual binary. They have, in Dreger's words, objectified and «disappeared» them, and I would argue that this is true for both myth and medicine. That intersexual activists reclaim some of the historical hermaphrodite images and statues and are willing to «own» (Preves 120) them, is as political a move as the usage of the term hermaphrodite on ISNA's famous «hermaphrodites with attitude» T-Shirt.

The mythic and metaphoric hermaphrodite has been a recurring figure in academic writing about gender and sexuality, not as an object of the critical interest, mind you, but as precisely myth and metaphor. Georgia Nugent, for instance, wrote in an essay on Ovid's Hermaphrodite, published in 1990: «First, of course, this sex is not one, in the sense that it does not exist, except as a sexual fantasy or a mutant aberration. […] This status as pure construction may make the hermaphrodite particularly valuable as a research site» (162). In 1993, Emma Donoghue in an analysis of the intertwining ideas of lesbian sex and hermaphroditical anatomy in late 17th century Britain wrote that a woman who desired women could thus be explained away as «that half-mythical anomaly, a hermaphrodite» (200). To make this perfectly clear, Donoghue's point that heterosexism or homophobia was (and is) one of the driving forces behind policing clear-cut sexual and gender binaries[9] and that – in Dreger's words – «the hermaphrodite and the homosexual share a surprising amount of medical history» (31) is well taken – not so Donoghue's 'mytho-

[9] Cf. for instance Preves 35f.

pathologizing' abjection. The hermaphrodite has in fact functioned as a metaphor of heterosexuality itself – dating back to Aristophanes' story of the origin of love, as well as Ovid's Hermaphroditus and the nymph, of course – and was appealing still as a headline to a text on «hermaphrodite patients», meaning heterosexual couples undergoing in-vitro-fertilization treatment published in 1995 (Ploeg 460). We also find the figure of the hermaphrodite haunting the idea(l) of androgyny. Androgyny came to be looked at askance in feminist analyses, because of «how the feminine is produced for the purpose of 'civilizing' or perfecting a male subject whose implicit supremacy is never challenged[10]» (Weil 148), as well as for its underlying ideals of wholeness and unity. But it is also a concept that, as a «spiritual and intellectual ideal» has always been very anxious to police its boundaries against the «physical anomaly of hermaphroditism»[11], a concept, in other words, that appears to suffer from acute heteronormative fear of queer embodiment. In too many academic texts, intersexuality simply functions as disability does commonly in narratives:

> «Other than in autobiography, disability seldom has been explored as a condition or experience in its own right; instead disability's psychological and bodily variations have been used to metaphorize nearly every social conflict outside of its own ignoble predicament in culture» (Davis *Enforcing* 12; see also Mitchell 25).

It is a long way from «half-mythical anomaly», «sexual fantasy», «mutant aberration», and «pure construction» to any interest in the cultural work that intersexuality does, the way it is made sense of – fictionally, autobiographically, or on Chicago Hope[12].

As perhaps the most widely received and embraced cultural product dealing extensively with intersexuality in recent years, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning (2003) novel Middlesex is a good place to begin thinking about how intersexuality as an 'experience in its own right' is made sense of in representations. Georgia Nugent, who was so intrigued by the «non-existent» hermaphrodite, argued that there were two possibilities of this «pure constructions'» representation: it could be conceived of as plentitude, or (as in Ovid) as a horrible loss, the destruction of

[10] Or in the words of Donna Haraway: «[T]he male person who, while enjoying the position of unbelievable privilege, also has the privilege of gentleness» (Penley and Ross 19).
[11] Carolyn Heilbrun as quoted in Weil 149.
[12] This CBS television show aired an episode featuring the birth of an intersexed baby on 29 April 1996: The Parent Rap (season 2).

sexual potency, ambiguous, deficient, a «diminished male» (163 and 176f). And it is important to realize that even though – as Eugenides explained in an interview – Cal Stephanides, the narrator, is «a real living hermaphrodite, not a mythical creature like Tiresias or a fanciful one like Orlando» (Eugenides interview), Middlesex makes use of precisely the two age-old options outlined by Nugent to render the capacities of its narrator. Plentitude comes into play heavily in the first half of the book, where the narrator (except for some Berlin interludes) tells what Eugenides in an interview has called «the epic stuff», the family history that has enjoyed so much attention from critics, supplying blurbs like «a broad swath of Greek-American life», «the great Greek-American novel», and «the most reliably American story there is». Calliope is, after all, the name of the epic muse[13]. And the novel does weave plenty of historical events and personage into this family's story, including e.g. the Turkish invasion of Smyrna, the Prohibition, and the early days of the Nation of Islam.

For the first half of the novel, this epic narrator indulges in something like fantastic or speculative omniscience[14], on one occasion admitting, «Of course, a narrator in my position (pre-fetal at the time) can't be entirely sure about any of this», (MS 9) while at other times affirming the potency of that position: «I alone, from the private box of my primordial egg, saw what was going on» (MS 206). Günter Leypoldt, reading these passages as representative of a certain kind of «new-neorealist» (24) writing, offers a useful analysis of the stylistic accessibility the novel maintains through its high degree of narrative closure accorded by (among other things) the narrator's point-of-view:

> «Eugenides's playful narrative irony blurs neither his cultural critique nor the emotional appeal of its melancholy plot. […] [D]espite its considerable narrative drive and occasional tongue-in-cheek employment of classic postmodernist devices, narrative closure is sufficiently maintained to guarantee a relative stylistic accessibility» (24f).

For the second half of the book, the narrator becomes part of events. This change doesn't affect narrative closure or stylistic accessibility while somewhat modifying the point-of-view and intimacy (as in closeness between reader and protagonist) of the

[13] Not only critics are under this epic spell that makes it possible to evade some of the presumably more difficult issues. UC San Diego's library catalog lists the following keywords for Middlesex: «Greek American (Fct.); City and town life (Fct.); Suburban life (Fct.); Detroit (Mich.) (Fct.); and [my favourite!] Gender/form: Domestic fiction».

[14] Cf. for instance MS 18 («this can't be true») or 110 (keeping an amusement park open for narrative «purposes»).

narration:

> «I've never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I've entered my story, I need them more than ever. I can't just sit back and watch from a distance anymore. From here on, everything I'll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events. Here's where my story splits, divides, undergoes meiosis» (MS 217).

Somewhat surprisingly after such an announcement, this is by no means the end of plentitude, because it is precisely Calliope's/Cal's intersexuality that allows the narrative voice to not 'split' the narrative drive of the story at all. Speculative omniscience is still part of the story, only now it is accorded by moments of «[…] the ability to communicate between the genders, to see not with the mono-vision of one sex but in the stereoscope of both». This ability might be more poignantly described as amounting to mind-reading, to knowing «what everyone was feeling» (MS 269). The real difference between the family story and Calliope/Cal's personal life story is that in the latter deficit joins plentitude. Growing up as a girl, Calliope experienced deficit facing the «impossible demands» (MS 452) of normative femininity and female hood, hoping and pleading for the onset of her period (MS 350). Deficit experienced in living as a man for Cal revolves around anxiety and shame about reactions to his genitals and the «great fact of his condition» (MS 320), as well as infertility: «I can't have children. That's one of the reasons, aside from shame, why I decided to join the Foreign Service» (MS 106).

Middlesex' narrator between what Nugent termed plentitude and deficiency thus bears more than just traces of the «mythic hermaphrodite». As the narrator remarks, it is Cal/liope's extraordinary body that «had lived up to the narrative requirements» of Chekov's «gun on the wall» (MS 396). It might be said to function as a «crutch to ensure the novelty» (Davis *Enforcing* 13) of the subject matter, and a means of differentiating the narrator / protagonist: «[M]y genitals have been the most significant thing that ever happened to me. Some people inherit houses […]. I got a recessive gene on my fifth chromosome […]» (MS 401). So intersexuality (pinned in the previous quote on Cal/liope's recessive gene and its [alleged] manifestations rather than on a heteronormative cultural system of binary sex and gender classifications) certainly functions in this novel as what David Mitchell has called a «narrative prosthesis» (16). Yet at the same time, the fact that it is a first person narrative can be seen as Middlesex's chance to not simply metaphorize and overlook the individual and political struggles in the way fiction usually uses

disability (Davis *Enforcing* 20f) or difference. Accordingly, Calliope/Cal also deals with some more or less familiar features of an «unthinkable intersexual's»[15] narrative – including painful, humiliating and dehumanizing medical examinations (MS 412, 419, 422), hate violence (MS 476f), self-discovery and struggle for information (MS 430, 453), being reduced to a myth in a sexualized freak show (MS 490), befriending an early intersexual activist (MS 488), and insights like the following two:

> «Normality wasn't normal. It couldn't be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself. But people – and especially doctors – had doubts about normality. They weren't sure normality was up to the job. And so they felt inclined to give it a boost» (MS 446).

> «My swagger wasn't that different from what lots of adolescent boys put on, trying to be manly. For that reason it was convincing. Its very falseness made it credible» (MS 449).

Moments of a critique of normalcy – central to queer as well as disability concerns (McRuer 91) – like these, or the strong repudiation of evolutionary biology (MS 478f), are balanced out by awkward displays of mainstream appeal through supposedly funny 'facts'. When hair starts showing on pubescent Calliope's upper lip, we are told why this is not surprising for a girl in her family:

> «Like the Sun Belt or the Bible Belt, there exists, on this multifarious earth of ours, a Hair Belt. It begins in southern Spain, congruent with Moorish influence. It extends over the dark-eyed regions of Italy, almost all of Greece, and absolutely all of Turkey. It dips south to include Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt […]» (MS 308).

Eugenides cites Dreger's book as one of his sources, where indeed she explains that for French and British «medical men» in the late 19th century, there were accepted mitigating factors when considering otherwise «sexed» traits like facial hair: «Race, age, sexual practices, insanity- […]» (106). And what might be taken as an opportunity to once again affirm the obvious, namely that bodies are not only sexed, but also categorized in multiple other ways, and that the classifications and meanings of woman, man, intersex are neither stable, nor trans-historical, nor culturally universal, Middlesex takes as an opportunity to espouse

[15] Cheryl Chase as quoted in Dreger, 98.

19th century racism. The characterization of the background of the nurse delivering baby Calliope falls into the same category of questionably funny 'fact', giving readers the ability to «leave the site of fiction with our own membership in normalcy further consolidated and assured» (Davis *Enforcing* 15). The nurse is Appalachian, and «[i]nbreeding is common in Appalachia, as are genetic deformities […]» (MS 215).

Whatever happens to Cal's body is safely contained in a mutated gene, so that everyone else can inhabit the sexual binary almost undisturbed. Julie Kimchi, for instance, who falls in love with Cal in Berlin, is assured: «'Your body's not like a boy's', I said» (MS 184). Likewise, naturalized heterosexuality will be happy to hear Cal note: «Breasts have the same effect on me as on anyone with my testosterone level» (MS 166). If, as Lennard Davis remarks, «the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her» (Davis *Constructing* 21), these moments might function to ensure a reader identification with Cal as a normative (if not completely normal) man. In McRuer's terms, while the novel certainly explores what it means for Cal to be virtually queer, the character falls short of exposing what it might mean to be critically queer:

> «In contrast to a virtually queer identity, which would be experienced by anyone who failed to perform heterosexuality [or gender I would at least add; A.K.-R.] without contradiction and incoherence (i.e., everyone), a critically queer perspective could presumably mobilize the inevitable failure to approximate the norm […]» (95).

Queer gender questioning in the novel is counterbalanced again and again with essentialist fact finding. A social model of disability that insists «hermaphroditic genitals are not diseased» (MS 106) and a medical model of genetic cause and effect are made to cancel each other out, supporting the readers' «appetites for the exotic» (Mitchell 23) by posing intersexuality as non-threateningly located in an-other body. Confronted with the difficulty of voyeurism and curiosity as to the exact 'nature' of Cal's (not very) private parts, Middlesex suspends and titillates them in floral and metaphoric descriptions of her/his «crocus» (MS 330), which is later 'unveiled' only in the medical terminology of Dr. Luce's report (MS 435) – a move from exotic to medical that does little to illuminate the politics and stakes of exposure, or address the stunning prevalence of the notion that it is perfectly alright to demand or force trans* and intersexed people to have 'public genitals'. If we agree that a «change in attitudes about intersexuality will need to occur within a cultural context where

other kinds of gender 'contradictions' are legitimated» (Kessler 123), the many ambivalent and mixed messages to be found in Middlesex can leave behind a certain feeling of frustration[16], especially given both its circulation and 'stylistic accessibility'.

Eugenides' novel, as I have tried to show, puts intersexuality in a position that can be thought of as located in the 'I' of the norm, because it invokes and draws on the power and authority of omniscient narration, epic story-telling, and a very present[17] heterosexual and assertively male author, while simultaneously trying to pass as a realist intersexual first-person account. It draws upon a social as well as a medical model of disability or physical deviation, mixing mildly transgendered sensitivities with naturalized heterosexuality. These balancing acts might partly be what makes the novel such a huge success. Queer poet and intersex activist Thea Hillman hasn't sold as many books yet by asking «Or was it there at all until other bodies defined it so?» (50).

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[16] In much the same way that for Donna Haraway «Octavia Butler is a very frustrating writer in some ways, because she constantly reproduces heterosexuality», in: Penley and Ross, 12.
[17] As far as the media and literary public sphere are concerned.

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Haute Tension: Lesbian Audience and the Slasher Film

Iva Radat

Introduction

This paper examines the slasher subgenre of the horror movie with in view of readings available to the female, feminist, and lesbian viewers not generally considered slashers' target audience. For the purpose of this analysis, I make use of psychoanalytic film theory combined with an audience-oriented approach, analyzing both the representational and interpretative strategies employed by different audiences. I end with a close reading of the 2003 French slasher Haute Tension in order to demonstrate the richness of meaning available in the modern-day slasher and the variety of interpretative strategies that a female / feminist / lesbian viewer can employ to obtain pleasure and affirmation from the slasher film.

Putting the psycho back into psychoanalysis

In her 1983 essay When the Woman Looks, Linda Williams echoed powerful feminist voices denouncing the horror genre in general – and the slasher in particular – as sadistic, misogynous, and entirely male-oriented. Williams followed in the footsteps of Laura Mulvey whose seminal work Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema described the film viewing process in mainstream cinema from a psychoanalytic perspective, «demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form» (Mulvey 1989 [1975]: 14). According to Mulvey, the pleasure in looking, or scopophilia, can take the form either of a gaze which is active and objectifying (i.e. voyeuristic), or of a narcissistic gaze which allies the spectator with the male protagonist through narrative centering on the male figure and his gaze. The image of the woman on screen signifies the threat of castration for 'the male unconscious', which is resolved either through the process of investigation of the female character, and her consequent punishment or saving, or through her fetishization («disavowal of castration») (21). The first tactic, voyeurism, is linked to sadism: «pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness» (21-22). Williams detects this patriarchal logic in the horror movie as well: an active, curious look exercised by the female character is necessarily punished since the woman's gaze threatens the male character's / spectator's voyeuristic pleasure by disabling the observer to look on from a safe distance. In classical horror films, the woman's look at the monster petrifies her and allows the monster to «to master her through HER look» (1996 [1983]: 18,

original emphasis). Thus, the gaze becomes both the cause and the vehicle of women's victimization. Yet, as Williams notes, the monster poses as the woman's double in important respects; in his freakishness, he is the spectacle exposed to the active gaze of the audience, and could be understood as «a distorted reflection of [the woman's] own image» (22). In his difference from the 'normal' male, in his non-phallic and thus threatening sexuality, he is much like the woman, symbolizing «a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack» (20). Thus, the female look at the monster is not only a look of horror, but also a look of recognition, or «sympathetic identification» (21). Considering the subversive potential of this recognition, it is no wonder, Williams concludes, that the female character is punished for her potentially conspiring look at the monster. Williams also examines what she calls «psycho at large» horror films (27), featuring a physically ordinary looking but psychologically disturbed monster. Here she includes slasher films and their precursor Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), criticizing their tendency to portray women either as victims or monsters, in the process sparing those female characters which display «absence of sexual desire» (27). She praises film critic Roger Ebert for «identifying and condemning the onslaught of these offensive films» (32), and uses his observations about the killer's rare presence on the screen to deduce how it is that the woman character's mutilated body becomes «the only visible monster in the film» (31). It is no wonder then, Williams reasons, that women so often cannot bear the sight of horror movies, since they are faced with their own «powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation, and murder» (15).

The attitudes expressed by Williams and mainstream critic Ebert reflect the dominant feminist response to the slasher in the 1970s and 1980s (Jancovich 2001: 8). The most challenging apology of the genre came from Carol Clover. In the chapter of her book devoted to the slasher, Her Body, Himself, Clover places under scrutiny slasher films from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, such as The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974), the Halloween series, the Friday the Thirteenth series, and the Nightmare on Elm Street series. Clover describes the slasher as the story of a psychopathic killer who goes on a rampage, killing mostly women, «until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived» (1993 [1992]: 21). This Final Girl, as Clover dubs her, is the protagonist of the slasher «in the full sense», since her role contains both «the functions of suffering victim and avenging hero» (17). Drawing on the narrative structure of the slasher, the cinematography and audience reactions, she demonstrates the extent to which the average viewer identifies with the female protagonist, rooting for her as she is striking back at the killer. Thus accusations that the slasher places the

spectator in the killer's shoes, and lets (or makes) him/her indulge in the sadistic slashing of females, are proven partial at best. Clover does not completely reject sadistic voyeurism as a cinematic pleasure available through horror viewing, but claims that it is not «the first cause of horror», which she sees as primarily victim-identified (19). Clover points out how the slasher's dominant audience is adolescent boys whereas the protagonists are females, which poses interesting questions concerning viewer identification.

S(ex)/G(ender) roleplay

Film theorists have accepted cross-identification as an option for viewers, but mostly as characteristic of female viewers. In Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's Duel in the Sun (1946), Mulvey countered accusations of subsuming the female spectator under the male by explaining how she did not specify the sex of the spectator precisely because she was «interested in the relationship between the image of woman on the screen and the 'masculinisation' of the spectator position» (1999 [1981]: 122). Regardless of the spectator's sex, in the viewing process s/he is gendered male. The female spectator can then either reject the masculinization and accept passive femininity, or agree to it through «trans-sex identification» (122). Mary Ann Doane further investigated cross-sex identification. According to Doane, women are socially constructed through their bodies and cannot distance themselves from their bodies to a degree that would allow the assumption of either the voyeuristic gaze or the fetishistic one. For the female spectator, visual pleasure is experienced through masochism and/or narcissism, «the masochism of over-identification» with the female image, or «the narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire» (1999 [1982]: 143). Distance from the image can be inserted only through transvestism, which entails adopting the masculine spectatorial position, or through masquerade involving an excess of femininity. Thus it has traditionally been the female spectator who was generally conceived as more flexible and open to cross-sex identification, whereas the male was considered to undergo conventional identification, «presumably on the assumption that men's interests are well served by the traditional patterns of cinematic representation» (Clover 43). This assumption however cannot account for the persistence of the female protagonist in a male-oriented subgenre such as the slasher. Clover offers a complex and fascinating explanation of the phenomenon. The fact that a screen female fighting back and committing violence is credible to begin with is, according to Clover, the heritage of second-wave feminism. Horror stresses the suffering, victimized

part of a story rather than the avenging part (such as in an action movie), and in that way offers the possibility of masochistic pleasure, with the woman serving as «a front through which the boy can simultaneously experience forbidden desires and disavow them on the grounds that the visible actor is, after all, a girl» (18). In stark opposition to slasher critics, Clover therefore grounds the predominantly male activity of horror-viewing as an exercise in masochism. Furthermore, the gender identity of the characters themselves is not a matter of sex, says Clover. Drawing on Laqueur's findings, she argues that the horror operates within both the two-sex model of psychoanalysis and the one-sex logic of Medieval times, which «constructed the sexes as inside versus outside versions of a single genital / reproductive system», hence «ultimately fungible versions of one another» (13). This allows for fluidity and changeability of gender identity; Clover illustrates this by pointing to what she calls the psychopath's «gender distress» (27) and the boyishness of the Final Girl. The killer, says Clover, is normally a male «propelled by psychosexual fury» (27), with unresolved issues about his own sexuality or gender identity tied in with murderous impulses (the prototypical example being Psycho's Norman Bates who kills Marion when she arouses him and awakens the fury of his other self, his domineering mother, whose clothes he wears when attacking). «[H]is masculinity is severely qualified», Clover argues, «he ranges from the virginal or sexually inert to the transvestite or transsexual» (47). (Such statements about what masculinity is or should be, which Clover makes without a moment's hesitation or qualification along the lines of «severely qualified in the eyes of an average adolescent male», throw a shadow over otherwise excellent critical reasoning.) Clover here detects the psycho-killers' affinity with classical monsters as described by Linda Williams; killers in the slasher are constructed as 'bisexual' and aligned with femininity, therefore representing the threat of non-phallic potency, and as a result made monstrous (47-48). The Final Girl on the other hand is from the start boyish in her dress, behavior and name; when chased by the killer, she displays resourcefulness, courage, and level headedness. What is more, she exercises active investigating gaze, looks at the monster, and attacks him with phallic weapons, taking up his rules of the game, undergoing «phallicization» (50). Clover also points to the similarity between the slasher and Victorian flagellation literature, where the beaten female is boyish because she is in fact a transformed male. The female character then merely serves to veil the homosexual fantasies into a form acceptable to the heterosexually identified male spectator. «What is represented as male-on-female violence, in short, is figuratively speaking male-on-male sex» (52). This is why, according to Clover, the Final Girl normally stands out from other female characters in her lack of

sexual activity or interest in men; in order for the underlying homosexual fantasy not to be transparent, it is required that sex be coded as violence, and that the Final Girl be portrayed as sexually chaste.

After fighting against a unanimous rejection of the slasher, however, Clover warns against an overly enthusiastic celebration of it as a feminist development, since from all of the above interpretations the slasher seems like «a thoroughly male exercise» (53). To her conclusion, though, I would have to add, if the point of reference is the male spectator; Clover offers questions, but no propositions about the viewing experience of the female spectator. Clover finishes her compelling critique by pointing to the excess of meaning left if the Final Girl is understood as nothing more than a male stand-in:

> «[…] the text at every level presents us with hermaphroditic constructions – constructions that draw attention to themselves and demand to be taken on their own terms. For if we define the Final Girl as nothing more than a figurative male, what do we then make of the context of the spectacular gender play in which she is emphatically situated?» (55).

This «theatricalization of gender» (59) is according to Clover «an integral element of the particular brand of bodily sensations in which the genre trades» (57). «The gender-identity game» however, is not exclusive to horror, says Clover, proposing that it might be «openly mock[ing] the literary / cinematic conventions of symbolic representation» (59), where sex is a one-way indicator of gender. She links this with the fact that the experience offered by horror films is in itself «feminine», as Hitchcock put it, even though in the end the audience is inevitably «masculinized» (59). The progress according to Clover lies in the fact that the masculinization comes about through a female body. Finally, she speculates that such gender play resulted from the breakdown of traditional gender roles through the women's movement, higher divorce rate, women in the workplace etc., leading to «a loosening of categories» (62-63).

Barbara Creed devotes more attention to the female slasher viewer. Creed looks into the affinity between monstrosity and femininity in patriarchal representation by exploring images of the female monster, or as she calls her in order to emphasize her difference from the male monster, «the monstrous-feminine» (1994 [1993]: 3). She criticizes writings on the horror genre that simplify gender relations in horror as featuring man as the castrating monster and woman as the victim, representing lack and absence (152). Creed points to the number of «castrated male bodies» in the slasher, in combination with a powerful female

as «the avenging castrator», *femme castratrice* (153). In a reversal of roles described by the Mulveyan paradigm, this version of «the monstrous-feminine» «controls the sadistic gaze: the male victim is her object» (153). Creed reclaims the pleasure in horror film watching for female viewers; in opposition to Williams, who claimed that female spectators of the horror / slasher are not given much to identify with, Creed states that if there is a powerful female presence on screen, even if it is a monstrous one, the female spectator will identify with her at some level (155). She might feel empowered, even «derive a form of SADISTIC PLEASURE in seeing her sexual other humiliated and punished» (155, emphasis added). Some critics have argued that in this way the female protagonist is phallicized, i.e. «reconstituted as masculine» (155). Creed, however, emphatically rejects the equation of aggression with masculinity on the grounds of its essentialism. For Creed the real fear men have concerning castration is not that the woman has been castrated, but that she castrates. The embodiment of this fear, «the deadly *femme castratrice* [...] has been repressed in Freudian psychoanalytic theory», but «exists in the discourses of myth, legend, religion and art» (127), says Creed. «The slasher film actively seeks to arouse castration anxiety [...] It does this primarily by representing woman in the TWIN roles of castrated and castrator, and it is the latter image which dominates the ending» (127, original emphasis). Yet for all its potential to enable the female spectator to identify with a powerful female screen presence, Creed warns against embracing this image as «'feminist' or 'liberated'» (7). After all, portraying women as deadly and dangerous might be seen as vilification. Creed entertains the notion that this is intentionally so, but rejects it because «the unconscious is [not] subject to the strictures of gender socialization», and has fears and desires that are universal to «the human subject» – the fear of pain and death (156). She however admits to the existence of the gendered subject, with its specific unconscious fears and desires, «male fears of woman's reproductive role and of castration and woman's fears of phallic aggressivity and rape» (156). As «women still lack access to the means of production», the horror will continue to thematize largely male fears and desires (156). This, however, does not deny the female spectator either viewing pleasure or identification on various levels and to various degrees.

The rage fantasy

An immensely popular strand of feminist film theory, the psychoanalytic approach employed by thus-far mentioned critics has elicited sharp criticism from other feminist film critics. As Cynthia A. Freeland sums up, the «psychodynamic» framework attempts to explain the spectator's interest in horror films and

locate the source of this horror, but misses the larger socio-historical context which shapes the construction of gendered subjects, risking «radically culture- and era-bound» conclusions (1996: 200). This approach also completely ignores the position of individual viewers socially situated in terms of their race, class, or sexual orientation. Instead of the psychoanalytic model, Freeland proposes a much broader framework which would take into consideration the conditions of both production and reception of horror films, including inquiry into different kinds of audiences with their own potentially subversive, nonstandard readings. Such a framework would include examination of the films' representational strategies, «so as to scrutinize how the films represent gender, sexuality, and power relations between the sexes», i.e. their «gender ideology» (204-205), not only in terms of content but film form as well (the two are indistinguishable anyway). In line with the heritage of cultural studies, Freeland recognizes films as cultural artifacts, both indicative of social belief systems and involved in their perpetuation / alteration / dismantling.

As Freeland herself notes, her approach is rooted in the 'images of women' approach, developed in the early 1970s, and since then often rejected as simplistic and naive for its understanding of film as a (distorted) reflection of reality. This approach was concerned with the depiction of women within the film narrative; a typical example of it is Sharon Smith's 1972 text The Image of Women in Film: Some Suggestions for Future Research which speaks of «sex-role stereotypes» showing women as «confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual beings» (1999 [1972]: 14-15). «[M]edia now SHAPE cultural attitudes, as well as reflect them» (14, original emphasis), wrote Smith; and thus further the oppression of women through the perpetuation of existing power relations and gender roles as normal and desirable, as well as by misrepresenting those women who do not fit the norm. Obvious and over-simplified as these comments might seem now, having been (revised and) incorporated into mainstream criticism, they did point to the ideological investments of art and popular culture. The other important source informing Freeland's framework in its emphasis on the audience and the dialogue between the film text and its viewers is audience-oriented approach championed by Annette Kuhn and Jackie Stacey. Kuhn made an important distinction between the individual spectator and an audience, «people who can be surveyed, counted and categorized according to age, sex and socioeconomic status» (Kuhn 1999 [1984]: 150). For the purposes of a feminist analysis, the concept of a gendered audience prompts the introduction of a wider social discourse into the relationship between films and their viewers, attempting to «come to terms with discursive formations of the social, cultural and textual» (154). In the process, a distinction is

formed between femaleness and femininity, which are defined as (social) gender and subject position respectively. «For example, it is possible for a female spectator to be addressed, as it were, 'in the masculine'», says Kuhn (151). Such a perspective deepens and refines the 'images of women' approach: indeed, Clover's reading relies on this very assumption. Stacey also points to the significance of the social dimension of cinema identification. She investigates the complexities of the processes of identity formation, «which NEGOTIATE the boundaries between self and other» (1999 [1991]: 198, emphasis added). Her analysis points out the diversity of responses an audience produces to a single viewing experience.

In her analysis of the horror genre, cultural analyst Isabel Pinedo integrates important facets of the approach outlined above without relinquishing the psychoanalytic perspective. She investigates the horror genre with the specific purpose of addressing the female spectator and the pleasure that she can find in the horror. Why do women watch horror films? Pinedo believes that the element of control inherent in the process of watching a film due to its «temporally and spatially finite nature» (41) turns fright into a pleasurable experience, where «fear and pleasure commingle» (39). This she calls recreational terror. Its importance lays in the fact that it enables the female spectator «a pleasurable encounter with violence and danger» (6). Drawing on Freud's description of the dream, Pinedo describes the horror film as «unearth[ing] the repressed», and in that way being an «exercise in coping with the terrors of everyday life» (39). «The horror film is the equivalent of the cultural nightmare, possessing material that is simultaneously attractive and repellent, displayed and obfuscated, desired and repressed» (40). Thus viewing horror films gives vent to feelings and thoughts that are otherwise difficult to face; for women, one such feeling is rage, and one such thought the exercise of violence; both of which the female spectator can experience through identification with the female protagonist of the slasher movie. Pinedo makes an interesting comparison between horror viewing and the rape fantasy as analyzed by feminists: both allow women to «experience taboo emotions (be they rage or sexual arousal) and vicarious actions (be they killing or fucking) without the onus of guilt», while remaining in control the whole time (86). Pinedo also offers a reason why many women avoid the slasher. As Clover herself admitted, the fantasy offered by the slasher is not only one of masochism, but also of sadism; «what motivates the avoidance of this violent genre is not only fear of being victimized but also fear of being violently aggressive», an option vigorously suppressed in women (85).

The psychoanalytic framework also posits heterosexuality as the norm. Drawing on Lynda Hart's observation that

aggressiveness historically marked the lesbian to a far greater extent than did the object of her desire, Pinedo detects «the specter of the lesbian» haunting the image of the aggressive female (82). Like Creed, Pinedo objects to the banishment of the active female to the category of masculinity, as to do so not only reinforces patriarchal logic, but also misses the degree of «gender trouble» present in the horror genre «commit[ted] to transgressing boundaries» (83). And that is precisely where feminist readings of the genre come in, argues Pinedo. Thus Pinedo manages to lay out an intriguing account of the genre's appeal to the female viewer, but also introduces the pleasures offered to the feminist viewer of the slasher.

Cluedo for lesbians

An examination of the lesbian viewer's visual pleasure has to begin with an examination into the ways lesbians have been present on or absent from the screen. As Andrea Weiss notes, too often «the primary forms of lesbian representation are, paradoxically, invisibility, erasure, repression» (1993 [1992]: 52). This absence «[works] to create and maintain the heterosexual 'sex / gender system' and the economic, social and political system it makes possible» (52). The images of lesbians that do manage to find their way onto the screen, especially in Hollywood cinema, are at best problematic and often serve to reinforce heteronormativity: «the lesbian vampire, the sadistic or neurotic repressed woman, the pre-Oedipal 'mother / daughter' lesbian relationship, the lesbian as sexual challenge or titillation to men» (1). However, despite many unfavorable depictions of lesbians in cinema, lesbian viewers have managed to obtain pleasure from film viewing; of course, the use of the concept 'lesbian audience', much like that of female audience can be charged with obliterating differences among lesbians of different race and class positions, to name but two of a host of identity-positions that crisscross this tentative category. However, as a denominator of an audience more readily susceptible to certain readings, identifications and pleasures, it is a helpful tool in furthering the discussion concerning viewing pleasure and the processes of audience-identification. Weiss notes how, in the absence of openly gay images, lesbian viewers over time employ(ed) various interpretive strategies to secure viewing pleasure; in the 1920s and 1930s for example, they looked for certain «gestures, expressions, costumes and looks», which were starting to be appropriated by «the emerging urban lesbian subculture as signs of lesbianism» (46). Looking for subcultural hints and clues was often coupled with a textually more intrusive strategy of 'rewriting' plots and endings to fit their (our) fantasy. Over time, lesbians in Hollywood moved from virtual invisibility to being portrayed as «frightening,

ridiculous and unnatural», and who, according to the Motion Picture Code, had to be punished within the film's narrative, often by their own hand (54). Drawing on the categorization made by Caroline Sheldon, Weiss describes the stereotypes employed in the representation of lesbians as «'the butch / mannish lesbian'; the 'sophisticated lesbian'; and the 'neurotic lesbian' (often 'femme' or closet)» (62). Of course, oppositional readings are and always were an option, but as Weiss notes, oppositional reading has its limits, and is / was always «more readily available to some lesbians than to others» (66). Wary about modern-day apparent liberalization of attitudes towards lesbians on film, she asserts that the images of today «still overwhelmingly serve heterosexual interests» (57), designing lesbian characters which will appeal to heterosexual males, and/or 'reforming' them into straight women in the course of the narrative.

Entering the debate on the processes of identification in cinema, Weiss challenges Doane's account of the female spectator in cinema, as not being able to account for the complexity of a lesbian's response. If the lesbian viewer desires the woman on screen, her position cannot simply be reduced to that of a heterosexual male, as the process of identification for lesbians is «inevitably more complex, indirect and selective than for heterosexual men who are cinema's intended audience» (28). As for the other spectatorial positions offered to women within Doane's model, that of «narcissistic or masochistic over-identification with the image», it is questionable whether, considering the few lesbian images offered to the lesbian viewer, she would identify «with either a virtually non-existent lesbian image or a pervasive heterosexual female one» (40).

Roaming the countryside in search of young women

After dwindling off in the 1980s, the slasher enjoyed a huge comeback in the 1990s with Wes Craven's immensely successful Scream trilogy. Making ironic reference to the slashers of late 1970s and early 1980s, the trilogy produced a number of imitators and sent new blood coursing through the seemingly spent subgenre. Due to its large budget and popular cast, it was seen by some as «the epitome of a mainstream commercial appropriation of 'authentic' horror, which they identified as a low-budget, underground and potentially subversive genre» (Jancovich 7). Extensive research into slasher films of the 1990s is yet to be carried out; by examining one very recent specimen of the subgenre I point to the subversive potential of modern-day slasher and the space for the insertion of the lesbian viewer.

The 2003 French horror Haute Tension (High Tension / Switchblade Romance, Alexandre Aja) is undoubtedly part of the slasher tradition; the plot involves a nameless psychotic killer who

roams the countryside in search of young women to mutilate, murder and use their bodies for sexual gratification. Disturbing a randomly chosen family house, he slaughters the father, mother and their young son, abducts the adolescent daughter of the family, and leaves the site of his blood-bath followed by the central female character who is attempting to save her best friend's life. Strong, smart, resourceful and brave, and suspicious of the opposite sex, Marie seems a typical Final Girl; opposite a large, white, truck-driving male as the killer. There is, however, a twist to the film's story which represents a novelty in relation to the staple movies of the slasher subgenre. The biggest part of the film is narrated as the flashback of the surviving female, Marie, the film's protagonist. Towards the end of the film, however, it is revealed that what has just been told – and, more importantly, shown – is the story as it was 'perceived' through the distorted psyche of the main character; the girl who portrayed herself as struggling with the merciless killer turns out to be the very same killer, as two identities inhabit the same body. Making the image lie is not a turn-of-the-century invention, yet always manages to attract accusations of fraud; «[t]he image on the screen is simply invested with an immutable aura of validity» (Monaco 1981 [1977]: 173). This device acquired popularity in very recent film history; Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999) and Identity (James Mangold, 2003) both used the same unreliable narrator, and Matrix (Wachowski Brothers, 1999) had its main character wake up to the fact that his (on-screen) reality was actually in his head. The technique of making the camera and the audience peer through the eyes of the film's protagonist has most famously been applied in Richard Montgomery's Lady in the Lake (1947), a film entirely shot using point-of-view camera. The slasher made subjective camera its trademark with the opening sequence of Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978),

> «[…] in which we adopt the vision of an entity that stalks a house, peers in windows, enters and goes to the kitchen for a carving knife, then proceeds up-stairs, opens a door, and stabs a young woman to death – all without knowing who 'we' are, and all without direct reference to the mediation of a camera» (Clover 185).

It has been argued that subjective camera enhances viewer identification, drawing the spectator more fully into the narrative. Clover criticizes this belief by arguing that rather than creating the illusion of participation in the narrative, the subjective, usually jerky, camera draws attention to itself since it breaks with the conventions of the medium. Clover's critique, however, has to be qualified as directed against those critics who see the point-of-view camera as a way of including the spectator into the sadistic

slashing (of the women on-screen). Aiming to prove her point, she does not dismiss this possibility altogether, but instead argues that at least in the end «this vision must be extinguished», with its bearer «punished and incapacitated – typically blinded or killed or both» (189). In this way the sadistic gaze, despite its identification potential, is shown to be aimed for destruction and is punished within the movie's narrative. Haute Tension, however, along with its predecessors Fight Club and Identity, departs from the jerky camera and does not offer (conventional and easily recognizable) clues to its audience that what they see is not necessarily objective representation of the story world. Indeed, it questions the very possibility that such representation is possible. Perhaps discomfort with this idea is why each of these films has encountered accusations of 'cheating'. An important element of all these films is that all three protagonists turn out to be bad guys / gals; the reason behind some viewers' feelings of manipulation could read as a result of having been made to identify with the villain/ness without consent. This might also explain why all three killers manage to stay alive, two of them moreover on the loose. In a marked departure from Clover's psychopaths, these movies do not punish their audience for the shared sadistic gaze, but instead leave them with the knowledge of having participated in the events that took place.

As far as surprise endings go, female killers are not a novelty in the genre, the most famous example of a female psychotic slashing away at teenagers being that of Mrs. Voorhees, a middle-aged woman avenging the death of her son Jason in Friday the Thirteenth (Sean S. Cunningham, 1979). Yet, as Clover notes, female killers are rare and «their reasons for killing significantly different from men's», as their motivation for killing does not stem from unresolved childhood issues, «but from specific moments in their adult lives in which they have been abandoned or cheated by men» (29). In that sense, Marie is a very 'masculine' version of a killer, since her murderous impulses result from the repressed lesbian sexual drive finding its outlet in the figure of a psychopathic killer. Consider for example the striking amount of similarity between her and Psycho's Norman Bates, whose «progeny [...] stalk[s] the genre up to the present day» (Clover 27). Norman spies on Marion undressing for a shower, and is compelled to kill her because she arouses him sexually, thereby enraging the mother half of his split personality. In Haute Tension, it is after Marie surreptitiously watches Alex showering that she goes to her room to masturbate; this is crosscut to scenes of the killer's truck approaching the house. Right after Marie comes, the killer does, too, ringing the bell. Intertwining the two actions through the technique of parallel montage, the surfacing of repressed lesbian desire becomes both semantically and formally directly linked to rising danger, and ensuing slaughter and death.

When faced with the possibility of acting out her lesbian desire, Marie gives way to her murderous double. As Clover makes note of, in the slasher film «violence and sex are not concomitants but alternatives», one functioning as «a substitute for and a prelude to the other» (29). The killer «propelled by psychosexual fury» is this time female, and her desire is for another woman. However, a significant break with tradition is contained in the fact that Marie does not go after Alex, but rather kills off her family, which is something I will return to later.

What light does the twist shed on the fundamental components of the genre? If the Scream trilogy was ironic in its mocking self-referentiality, Haute Tension's irony is of an altogether different order; the stereotype of a white male killer preying on young women is derided as fiction concealing a much deeper threat posed by the seemingly innocuous female friend, under whose guise lurks the monstrous lesbian. As in Psycho, «the monster is an insider» (Clover 30). On the level of spectatorship, it is interesting to note how the lesbian audience is drawn into the narrative of their own monstrosity through the use of the very interpretive strategies formerly employed to find affirmation in the movies. Namely, it is the lesbian spectator who is this time placed in the privileged position of a spectator with access to knowledge that enables her to pick up clues unnoticed by the heterosexual spectator. The latter might take Marie's androgynous looks, neither distinctly female nor male build, clothes or hair-style as the signature look of the Final Girl, but a lesbian aware of it as one of subculture's outward appearances, accepts her either consciously or not as a point of reference to her own identity. The subtleties of the *mise en scene* continue to draw a dividing line between the viewer in the know and the one unaware of the lesbian subtext. Marie displays jealous, almost possessive behavior towards Alex, who in turn taunts her about being an old maid; the lesbian spectator, used to picking up crumbs off the table set for a heterosexual romance, further adopts Marie as a figure of identification. The lesbian viewer and her heterosexual alternative(s) might as a result have very different opinions concerning the surprise ending's credibility, since Marie's off sexuality was for the lesbian audience part of the subtext. Through such strategies of representation, the lesbian viewer is interpellated into the movie's ideology; what are the messages that the film then sends to her and to the heterosexual male and female viewer?

Castration is a prerequisite for sexual pleasure!

Linda Williams detected a shared fate between the monster and the woman in the horror genre, an affinity expressed through a look of recognition that acknowledged their similar

position within the patriarchal order. In Haute Tension, this affiliation is taken to its extreme as the monster and the woman are collapsed into one and the same character. The psychotic killer of Haute Tension, however, doubles more specifically not just for the woman, but for the woman who rejects the man as superfluous in sexual relations. The nature of the connection between the woman and the monster that Williams brings to light, that of a sexuality differing from the sexuality of a 'normal' male, becomes glaringly obvious. The depraved sexual behavior of the killer, who is first seen impaling the severed head of a woman onto his penis, constructs him as a «freak with impossible and threatening appetites» (Williams 20), who finds sexual satisfaction in a mutilated (hence castrated) corpse. The killer's truck is seen containing torn bits of photographs showing women's heads, presumably those of his previous victims. When Marie sees Alex showering, Alex is shot thighs up, but headless. Obsessive fetishization of a (doubly) castrated female body is what lesbian desire gets translated into; moreover, it is the very castration that arouses the lesbian and her double, since we only see the killer in a sexual act with an already mutilated / castrated body. Castration is a prerequisite for sexual pleasure; lesbian desire is perverse, then, because it actively seeks knowledge of castration rather than trying to deny it. Paradoxically, it fetishizes the very act of castration. This search for evidence of castration is furthermore insatiable, as the killer is a serial one, in constant need of a new mutilated female body; the lesbian is hence coded as insatiable, «a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack» (Williams 20). The excess of dread felt by the audience at the monster's existence, due to the impossibility of discerning him from 'ordinary' males, is paralleled by the impossibility to discern the lesbian from a 'normal' woman; the monster as «biological freak doubles for woman» (Williams 19), not because of visible signs of depravity, but precisely due to their absence. The form of castration anxiety that Creed believes every slasher tackles, is in this film embodied in the ultimately monstrous creature – one that revels in its castrated monstrosity.

Even without the fineries of a psychoanalytic reading, it is not difficult to see how the movie's representation of lesbianism resurrects the pathologizing stereotype of the neurotic, repressed lesbian incapable of facing her desire without severe consequences for her life or sanity. The terrible knowledge Marie cannot bear the sight of is mirrored by the film's structure, which withholds this secret from its audience only to dramatically expose it late in the film. «The prominent manifestation of lesbian sexuality as a 'secret' derives not from some hidden, mysterious, or esoteric CONTENT, but is rather a discursive ACT performed by the hierarchical ideology that systematically reconstructs the hetero / homo binary» (Hart 1994: ix, original emphasis). Marie's

and the film's big secret is that she is on the wrong side of the divide. If, in Pinedo's words, the horror functions as a cultural nightmare, then this film could easily be interpreted as a nightmare of homosexual intrusion, a homophobic pamphlet featuring murderous lesbians. However, according to Wood the appeal of the horror is in the liberatory potential of identifying with the monstrous Other, that which does not respect societal norms: «[c]entral to the effect and fascination of horror films is their fulfillment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us» (Wood in Jancovich 13). That which is dreaded is at the same time desired. By forcing the audience to adopt this identity willy-nilly, the film gives its audience an alibi for a collective homoerotic fantasy, especially – but not exclusively – for the female spectator. Wood's interpretation hinged on the classical horror's portrayal of the monster as sympathetic and victimized, which is hardly applicable to the monster in Haute Tension. However, the monster is part of Marie's identity, the part that is created as the result of her inability to handle her desire; since she is herself unaware of the havoc her other self is wreaking on her surroundings, she seems victim to her own impulses, which is in itself a very powerful and disturbing fantasy to be entertained. Once it becomes clear Marie is the killer, the viewer might find herself/himself confused, perhaps even feeling compassion for the deeply disturbed lesbian protagonist; Marie is murderous yet fragile-looking, and, after all, kills for love.

Where does the dominant reading stop and the oppositional begin?

The most interesting reading of the film, which quite puzzled me when I first heard it, came from a friend of a friend, a teenage lesbian who described the movie as sad. I was almost incredulous at her response, as my own position was that of a (selectively) resisting reader; I enjoyed the dread the movie inspired in me, and desired Marie, but rejected the portrayal of lesbianism as insanity. As I wrote about the film and kept returning to it with newly acquired theoretical insight, I started discovering the potentially subversive readings that challenged the dominant one. I noticed for instance the conspicuous absence of any kind of narrative explanation for Marie's sexuality; nowhere is either her sexuality or her murderous rage brought into connection with a traumatizing experience or event. In comparison to Psycho's Norman, Marie has no domineering mother or father to be held responsible for her feelings or her behavior. In effect, it is solely because she cannot come to grips with her desire that she feels compelled to create another persona to take over this part of her identity. If only she could accept it, thinks the lesbian-friendly viewer, but if the viewer is a lesbian, she is fully aware of the obstacles in her way. The aspect of the story that suddenly stands out is the fact that Marie directs her anger not at Alex, the object of

her desire (as Norman does), but at Alex's family. On a very concrete level, this is where lesbians often encounter greatest resistance to their lifestyle; on a more general level, the family stands for society as a whole. If no trauma is referenced to account for the amount of self-hate Marie feels as a result of her lesbian drive (and providing the viewer does not believe the latter is or should be inseparable from the former), then the question that begs an answer is where such fierce hatred comes from. The answer to that question – from the society Marie grew up in – can shed more light on her motivation for the merciless killings she performs on the family unit. This kind of reasoning led me to better understand the exhilaration I felt at the sight of Marie poised with a chainsaw in hand; I came to accept her sadism and her murderous rage, the fantasy of getting even. Marie's outlet for anger and revenge can become the female, feminist, and/or lesbian viewer's outlet as well; and why should we not allow ourselves the fantasy of righteous wrath or even unabashed sadism?

As I write this, I force myself to watch the ending once again. The second-to-last sequence of the film is a chase scene in which Marie is running after Alex with a chainsaw. The camera once shifts between the chaser in the figure of the male killer and the figure of Marie, the voice alternating between his and hers, but largely holds on to the image of a psychotic male. Alex manages to stop a passing car, but they do not manage to get away on time. All throughout the gruesome murder scene of the driver, it is the crazed blood-smeared male, not Marie, that is being shown slashing the victim with his weapon, paralleled with the screaming Alex in the backseat, close ups of her face making me chant «abject terror is coded feminine». The wounded Alex attempts to escape by crawling on her back, desperately sobbing. «Do you love me? You don't love me. You don't love me, do you?», says the male, brandishing the now silent chain saw. Alex suddenly realizes what to say: «Yes, yes! Yes, I love you! Yes, I love you! I love you!», she cries out desperately. He sinks to his knees. A close up of the two figures now reveals Marie looking at Alex with incredible tenderness, pressing her lips against Alex's. The shot is undercut visually as well as sound-wise; with a chilling, dull sound the two blood-bathed faces join in an extreme close up, and I am shot through with conflicting emotions of dread and tenderness. Marie kisses the whimpering Alex; suddenly her face shows pain and surprise as Alex pierces her with an iron bar. She resumes her tender gaze and says, «[n]obody will ever come between us, Alex. Ever again. I will not allow anyone to come between us». Poised over Alex, Marie continues to chant the last sentence. The poignancy of the scene turns the rage into an age-old sadness over the humiliation that is being leveled at us. The movie, in short, is sad.

The epilogue

The amount of scopic control awarded to this female character is to this day unparalleled in the slasher; moreover, the end that, according to Clover, the killer must meet, that of destruction and punishment for exercising a sadistic look, is missing in this story's narrative. The ending of Haute Tension shows Alex observing Marie through a glass window in a lunatic asylum. The glass window that allows her to look at Marie disallows Marie the ability to look back: to her, the window is a mirror. Alex asks whether it is really true that Marie cannot see her, the person off-screen confirms; at that moment, Marie turns towards the glass window, and with a starry-eyed smile reaches for Alex. Pinedo echoes Dika's observation how the ending of the slasher reduces the female protagonist to a spectacle, «trapped within the confines of the frame and returned to her position as object» (Dika in Pinedo 93). The lesbian however refuses to be looked at, and refuses the narrative ending attempting to confine her within its frame; she looks back, with extraordinary power of vision.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the film viewing process from the perspective of a female, feminist and/or lesbian viewer in order to appropriate the pleasure of watching the slasher movie for these audiences. Through a critical examination of the existing literature in the field and applying the method of close reading of film texts, I demonstrated the richness of the material and the variety of interpretative strategies employed by these audiences. The scope of my research did not allow me to execute a more detailed overview of the slasher film from the 1990s onward; future research in the field could profit from a comparative perspective on the slasher proper and the recent slasher revival, since that would more completely test the existing theory against the grain of new film material, and offer new insights into the horror viewing process. What I have managed to show is that the pleasures of viewing slasher films are most certainly available even to the non-male, non-heterosexual audiences, and that it is precisely these audiences which bring slashers' subversive political potential to the surface.

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Filmography

Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999)
Friday the Thirteenth (Sean S. Cunningham, 1979)
Friday the Thirteenth series
Halloween (John Carpenter, 1978)
Halloween series
Haute Tension (High Tension / Switchblade Romance, Alexandre Aja, 2003)
Identity (James Mangold, 2003)
Lady in the Lake (Richard Montgomery, 1947)
Matrix (Wachowski Brothers, 1999)
Nightmare on Elm Street series

Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)
Scream trilogy
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974)

Biographical Note

After studying English at Zagreb's Faculty of Philosophy, Iva Radat acquired an MA in Gender Studies at the Central European University in Budapest. She has been involved in feminist and LGBT activism for several years, and published mainly in the area of cultural studies and film studies.

GenderFuck – a film / video program

Kara Lynch

GenderFuck braves the lines of gender identity and performance. Intrinsically queer, this program features works by / for and about a lesbian gay bi trans community. Sexuality and gender are performed across cultures and this program exposes the ways we construct identities inside and out of the confines of our social / historical contexts. This compilation highlights works that clearly recognize that our brains are part of our bodies no matter how messy and awkward that may be. GenderFuck is serious, playful, direct and embodied.

Embodiment + queerness

Queer. Bent. Perverse. There is a lot of talk about queering things. This entails shifting an ideological pull, changing the reading of an object, of an idea, of an image. To truly queer a thing is to take its meaning and turn it against itself. You can call me a fag to tell me that the society around me disapproves of my lifestyle and my object choices, hates who I am and what I represent. I can then call myself out: «I am a big old dyke». Queerly, I'm telling you that all of the negative connotations that come with this word for me become assets. I say, «That's right: I fuck women, I eat pussy, I look like a man, I look like shit in a dress, I wear tightie whiteys, I'm a gym teacher – what about it?!». These all describe me fully and I identify with that, I am that queer body. And what about bodies? All that other stuff is talk. What do we do with real bodies that fuck and suck and sing and play, and make performances and short films and videos?

Shey Oliver, a young trannyboy, tells us in a dim kitchen that he cannot always articulate why or how he is at odds with his own body. His gender is male, his body is not. He's got tits. He doesn't have the money to change that. He understands that this cannot sit well with most people, that they cannot see him for who he is without a good deal of explanation. It is in this body that he shares with a small group and the camera his process and transition. He is candid and insightful and his new friends are empathetic but they sit at a distance, a bit out of the frame.

Drag vs. gender performance

Masculinity performs itself. I identify this analysis with Judith Halberstam. The first time I heard her state this was at a panel discussion at the Whitney Museum sometime in the mid-1990s. It was an illustrious event because the panel coincided with a screening series of lesbian film and video. It seemed that somehow we had made it – we were in the Whitney Museum of

American Art. Judith pointed out a primary characteristic of Drag King performance that stared us in the face as we watched a documentary of this burgeoning art form. This drag did not have all the flare and flamboyance of the queens with whom we were more familiar. Those queens were more female than we could ever be, or would ever want to be. These dudes showcased a static electricity that we could identify with, but that did not always satisfy. There were no feathers or gold *lamé*. There were of course strong jaws, well-groomed facial hair, pompadours, thick work boots, slick hats, tailored suits. Far from vogueing but not unrelated, these kings sauntered the stage. Their gestures were small and managed. Their performances told us that all you have to do to be a dude is find your pose and look tough. And really, it did work. These kings were believable because they understood that masculinity performs itself. Live, sometimes these early Drag King performances left us wanting. On camera however, we could see the subtle innuendo of this gender-bending form. Fast forward to 2005. The queens and kings are still doing their thing. Some things never change, though the technology has improved. Drag King shows are no longer limited to New York, San Francisco, LA and just last year at Outfest – the Los Angeles LGBT film and video festival there was a documentary about Drag Kings on tour. In short, drag informs my interest in gender performance.

All the world's a stage – *cliché* and not always accurate – this adage takes on new meaning as we consider gender presentation and performance beyond the late-night show in our favorite gay club. The most common trait I found in the work in GenderFuck is the earnestness with which all of the makers and characters approach their respective gender performance. The program is framed by the dreamy never-never-land of gender ambiguity of Liz Rosenfeld's Untitled (Dyketactics Revisited) and the show stopping gospel performance of Ivan Montforte's And I'm Telling You. If you join us you must be willing to enter this nostalgic future and acknowledge that we are not going anywhere. At the center is Shey Oliver directed by Soraya Odishoo. Shey locates us in a present where gender ambiguity has real consequences in daily life. In the spaces between, drag raises its head and reminds us of its legitimacy as well as its shortcomings. Of particular note is A Long Time Coming. This work rips off and queers the last period of a championship hockey game. What could be viewed as good clean fun becomes heavy petting, man on man action. Masculinity oozes out of these burly, bearded guys as they bear down on an opponent, forcing their weight upon one another. This piece presents us with a hockey porn promo complete with the money shot.

Here is the ass-shot we've all been waiting for. In Whitey Tighties II our protagonist doubles our pleasure. Two views of the same great ass stutter before us. Front and back, profile – we join

a running dialogue between tracks. Butt cheeks shift as our model postures and poses – yup, tight white briefs make the 'man'. That and a flannel shirt, a dildo, and a clitoris that peeps through the pee hole. Why chose sides when you can have both. This piece is playful and serious as the soundtrack provides blurps and beeps to accent each new pose. In the last image, we reach deep inside the boy briefs to reveal a key. We take it out and put it back.

The static of this in-between place

Where can we go from here?

Our vision is confined by our expectations and by the limits of our frame of reference. The camera holds it all in. We cannot often see beyond the frame. Bodies enter the stage, walk awkwardly, set up a mic stand, then leave. We anticipate a show, a concert, and some event for us to share. The camera lens contains the scene. A group photo: the trace of something that may happen and the document of a coming together. It is posed and constructed by an off-screen voice. «Go there, move that, okay go to the right now, put it back where it was.» The frame is almost too wide and we forget that there may be something outside of it. We may forget that there is anywhere else but here. Social Movement emphasizes for me a dilemma in gender performance that is slow and static. This space is constructed for all kinds of bodies that represent a spectrum of what it could mean to be male or female and all that comes between. The work however begs the questions «Is this constructed space a comfortable one? Is it one that we may all enter and exit freely?». The actors move awkwardly and with trepidation. We begin to understand the in-between not as this totally transcendent space, but a transitory one filled with discomfort and re-consideration. At the same time that this may not sound so inviting or revelatory, it does have the strength of being a collective space where a community forms and defines itself through practice.

Dreams and utopias

This is a beautiful queer landscape with bodies on top of bodies layered upon more bodies. All afternoon we create a language between our ample, ambiguous bodies. We decorate each other with tape and paint. We eat cherries and lay about. We gather. In Dyketactics Revisited Liz Rosenfeld provides a space for play and exploration. Bodies collide and merge. This is both document of what could be and a fiction of what is. The director combines 16mm film with digital video to layer our reality. We know it's not the 1970s but it could be. We know that this is happening now, but we can still wish for it to become our future.

Occupying space

We are on the subway. A man's voice tells us our next station stop. A bearded lady stares us down. S/he has a thick auburn beard and moustache. Eyelashes bat thick with mascara. Lips glow with a recent application of gloss. It is the international week of the bearded woman, this is a Hairytale. The performance is both for the camera and for the public. We are in Madrid, Spain and our protagonist, Magui Valencia, preens in front of mirror. She applies her beard with the same care and confidence as she applies her bold green eye shadow. Magui takes the subway, walks through the university, and attends a party. She is defiant and sexy in a low cut black dress, rock-star glamour hair and full beard.

And I'm Telling You … I'm not going anywhere. Our singer addresses us directly. This R&B ballad turned protest and confession queers into a gospel refrain. He reaches out to us: can't we see how vulnerable and open he is? Can't we see that this is where we find ourselves, that there is no going back? Amateur night at the Apollo scales down to a quiet meditation on giving and taking and claiming some space for us. Our bodies force us to interact, one on one and collectively. This intimate moment brings down the house. Fade to black.

What happened to the fuck in genderfuck?

I began this project with the idea that there was really playful over-the-edge work out there that performed gender. These works would provide more than just theories; they would provide real experiences and possibilities played out for a camera, for a frame, for an audience. I had a dream of work that was overflowing and pushing the boundaries of my own gender imagination. In the end, I received a wide range of works, which employ sincere approaches to the question of gender. Some of it is fun and a bit goofy, but much of the work is earnest, honest and thoughtful. The work does not necessarily outpace my imagination, but as a group the pieces do jar and tangle our preconceived notions of what gender looks and feels like. What ties them all together is that real bodies perform gender to the best of their ability. Binaries of female and male mingle and scatter. The bodies that remain are too difficult to name easily.

At the end of the day, this program is not a radical stance. It exhibits an overflowing of sexuality and gender play. As a curator, the greatest challenge of this program was determining the order of events. I measured several elements: the pacing of work, the relationship between pieces, and how one piece could prepare us for the next, or disrupt our comfort zones. These considerations seem crucial in creating a conversation across

mediums and perspectives. I want the program to feel whole. I cannot say that I enjoy all the work in the program equally. I do however feel strongly that the work deserves consideration and that as a group, the pieces compliment each other. With this program I want to encourage other makers to play the field of gender: make it sexy, make it fun, make it yours.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank all the film and video makers who submitted work and those who gave me permission to compile their work into this program. They did all the work. Shout out to the network of folks through whom my call found its way to the dragking listserve. I would also like to thank my trannyboy students who keep this old school faggy dyke feminist on her toes. And Randa for talking me through the drag of it all.

Works and artists' biographical notes

Untitled (Dyketactics Revisited), 2005, 7.45 min, USA
Liz Rosenfeld

Bodies move freely through an ambiguous urban 'utopia' … Or do they? Shot on 16mm film and digital video, allow yourself to be led through the space where bodies exist independent of social codes. Dreamy landscapes, androgynous figures, skin, and concrete, masquerade through a fantasia of fluid forms referencing history while looking into the future. Inspired by Barbara Hammer's film Dyktactics made in 1974.

Liz Rosenfeld builds her practice as an artist upon her experience with collective education, direct action, contact, shared community, and collaboration. After completing a BFA in New Media at Hampshire College, she worked as a gallery assistant in a contemporary art space in New York City, before entering the Performance Department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she received her MFA in 2005. As one of the founding members of Chicago-based artist duos Keep Coming and Currency Exchange, she has curated several emerging artist shows in alternative spaces over the past year.

Her, 2003, 10 min, Canada
Kai Ling Xue

Her is a black and white Super 8 film presented in experimental narrative style with original music. The film is a meditation into fantasy and the solitude of love. Hand processed

film and advanced editing give Her an ephemeral and timeless quality, which illustrates the intensity of the subject matter.

Kai Ling Xue was born in Hualien, Taiwan and moved to Vancouver in 1997 to pursue her dream of becoming an interdisciplinary artist. Her work explores women's issues, race and sexuality. Her work has been shown at festivals and Biennales in Asia, Europe, the US and Canada.

Whitey Tighties II, 2005, 4 min, USA
Paula Cronan and Juliana Snapper

This is a goofy scramble inside butch panties. This version, Whitey Tighties II, is remixed from a 2001 performance in which a simpler, single-channel format of the video was projected above Juliana, who sang both parts of Mozart's sleazy courtship duet, La Ci Da Rem La Mano. Whitey Tighties II features reworked footage and a new soundscape by Snapper that creates a squishy sound moment from Pasolini's Salo in counterpoint with itself. New editing, sound, and the split-screen format weave together to form new rhythmic jumbles of meaning and surprise.

Paula Cronan and Juliana Snapper met in the San Francisco band Cypher in the Snow in 1998, and have been collaborating ever since. Their inter-media installations, videos, and operatic spectacles have shown on the east and west coasts and in Europe as part of the MIX / NYC Festival, the LA OUTFEST, and Fierce! Festival, UK, among others. Juliana sings experimental opera and writes about music. Paula works as a visual artist and musician, and longboards with Team Shredder. They live in San Diego, CA.

Shey Unveiled, 2003, 8 min, USA
Soraya Odishoo

Shey Oliver was a young man whom I met in New York about two years ago. He was sort of traveling through the east coast and needed to meet some friendly queers who would take him in, and that is what I was. He stayed with me for about one week and then went back to his college in Bellingham, Washington to study photography. Shey's story is very interesting because, unlike a lot of transgendered people I know, he has absolutely no funding behind him and no real way to go about moving through the physical process of becoming a man. In the interview he explains all of this, but you can tell how advanced his speaking and conviction has become through his condition. This is what Shey does for his life, and in his life he has to explain himself to almost everyone he meets. Shey is currently in his last year of college and plans to continue on to graduate school next fall for photography.

Soraya is a native New Yorker, daughter of an elementary school teacher and a nurse. She went to the School Of Visual Arts for film, and that is where she began her background in film. Shey was made at a very crucial time for her: the interview with Shey was the beginning of her understanding of transgenderism. Currently she is doing more acting than film making and participating in documentary work, production design and technical aspects of film and theatre.

Hairytales, 2004, 5 min, Spain / Mexico
Margarita Valencia, La Linea

As a tribute to international bearded women's week, La Barbura steps out on the town.

Magui is a writer, artist and philosopher. She is a member of La Linea, an interdisciplinary group of artists and writers in Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, CA. She currently studies in Madrid, Spain and continues to write her hypertext blog: Mis Violencia.

Long Time Coming, 2005, 5 min, Canada
Liss Platt

Long Time Coming represents my re-imagining of my favorite sport (and Canada's national pastime) as a queer soap opera cum porno. Comprised entirely of remixed audio and video from the last period of the 2004 Stanley Cup Final (Calgary vs. Tampa Bay), the piece forefronts the sexualized nature of the dance – where seductive glances give way to serious bump and grind, and a lifetime of longings are finally fulfilled. Crass, commercialized and queerly Canadian, it's all about the money shot.

Liss Platt is a media artist whose works take the form of videotapes, films, photographs, web sites, performances, and installations. Her artwork combines personal narrative, critical analysis, humor, and gender politics to explore the way various representations (popular, sub-cultural, artistic) inform our understanding of ourselves within the world. Liss received her MFA from the University of California, San Diego in 1992 and then participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in New York City. Her work has been screened and exhibited extensively throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. In 2003, she had a retrospective screening at Millennium Film Workshop in New York City, and a solo exhibition and performance at Stride Gallery in Calgary. Additionally, Liss Platt curates video and film programs, is involved in writing / editing for media publications, and does consulting for nonprofit media organizations.

Social Movement, 2005, 7.40 min, USA
Emily Roysdon

This video images a literal and metaphoric setting of the stage. It is concerned with memory, what and how we remember, as well as the associative arts of archiving and social movements. I consider the body's desire for stability, the idea that this desire 'inaccurately' records the excesses of pleasure and pain. It reveals the fictional and metaphoric potential of memory functions and forces my attention to the interplay of bodies and collectivity of movement and remembering. The project attempts to simultaneously create and perform the stage, to frame performance and memory through slow repetitious gestures. Constantly preparing the document of our presence, and the monument of our persistence.

Emily Roysdon is a Los Angeles and New York based interdisciplinary artist whose projects engage language, gesture and memory. She is an editor of LTTR, a feminist genderqueer art journal, and a co-founder of the dance / protest group Dykes Can Dance. She completed the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in 2001 and is currently a MFA candidate at UCLA. Her work has been exhibited at the Freedom Salon, Deitch Projects, New York; Art in General, NY; MIT – List Visual Art Center, Cambridge; Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius, Lithuania.

Speak Up, 2004, 2.40 min, USA
Randy Eisenberg

Two girls having it out, Hollywood Grand Dame style.

Randy is what is referred to in 'the business we call show' as a hyphenate. Randy does it all: write-direct-produce-edit-act, etc. He makes independent digital videos. «By independent, I mean low-budget. And by low budget, I mean no budget. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that I realize I shouldn't start packing my bags for Sundance.»

And I'm telling you, 2005, 3 min, USA
Ivan Montforte

A gospel singer reinterprets a Showtime at the Apollo Amateur Night standard.

Born in Mérida, Yucatán, México in 1973, Monforte lives in Long Island, New York. He studied at University of California, Los Angeles (BA, 1996), New York University (MFA, 2004), and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2004). Monforte's interdisciplinary practice uses simple gestures and materials, as well as emotional language and content as strategic tools to address themes of loss and mourning, representations of

gender, race and sexuality, and the pursuit of love. Holland Cotter in the New York Times recently described his work as «Strange and beautiful». Ideally, his art allows the viewer to negotiate a simultaneously intellectual and emotional relationship to the object, image, or performance.

Biographical Note

Kara Lynch is an independent video maker whose work troubles ideas of gender, race and representation. She currently teaches video at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, U.S.

«*Ja nisam prava žena*»: Gender and Sexuality in Two Memoirs from Beograd

Kevin Moss

In a recent show on Logo TV, the new cable network for the US LGBT community, drag comedian Coco Peru tells of a confrontation in the New York subway. «Faggot!» someone yelled down the car. She yelled back, «Don't you think I figured that out a long time ago? I'm wearing a dress!!». The conflation of homosexuality and transvestism is a corollary of the heteronormative requirement that sex, gender, and sexual orientation be aligned and visible. The same kind of conflation of gender and sexual orientation that makes Coco's comeback funny appears to be operative in Beograd as well, as two recent memoirs show. Both Vjeran Miladinović's Terezin sin (2001) and Uroš Filipović's Staklenac (2002) describe the lives of gay men in Beograd in the 1980s and 1990s, yet the memoirs reveal quite different strategies for enacting gay desire. Central to both, however, is the discourse that would line up sex, gender, and sexual orientation in a supposedly natural order.

As a literary scholar, I intend to present only a close reading of these two published texts and some supporting materials by the same authors. I do not pretend to show a full picture of either gay life or transvestism even in the relatively narrow focus of Beograd in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, even when these two accounts cite other conceptions about sex, gender, and sexual orientation, they are always filtered through the subjective authorial voice of Vjeran or Uroš. Yet their narratives do reveal various discourses about the construction of gender and sexual identity circulating in Serbian culture in the 1980s and 1990s. When I first submitted the title of this paper, I was reminded by the conference organizers that «[w]e hope to create a motivating and positive environment for all participants, try to explore gender transgression and move from the pre-conceived notions by not using words such as 'real' and 'imaginary' when referring to people's lives and experience»[1]. I use the term «real» in «I am not a real woman» only as a quotation of an actual transvestite prostitute and precisely with the goal of deconstructing the pre-conceived notion that underlies its use or denial.

Feminists and theorists of gender have disentangled biological sex (anatomical or chromosomal) from culturally constructed gender. No longer do we who study sex and gender assume that the 'natural' or 'real' or 'essential' sex of bodies (even assuming that there is only a binary) produces an equally 'natural' or 'real' gender. Queer theorists and transgender activists have

[1] Personal correspondence, 04/08/05.

done similar work in disentangling sex and gender from sexual object choice. The three categories – biological sex, culturally constructed gender presentation, and sexual orientation – can be oriented in any configuration. There is no reason for us to assume that a biological male who presents as a woman will not desire women, rather than men. Yet the overwhelming cultural force of heteronormativity still results in pressure to realign gender presentation and sexual orientation. As Eve Sedgwick puts it, «Normatively […] it should be possible to deduce anybody's entire set of specs from the initial datum of biological sex alone – if one adds only the normative assumption that 'the biological sex of your preferred partner' will be the opposite of one's own»[2]. Or as Judith Butler writes in Gender Trouble, «Institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms […] This conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire»[3]. If one is read as feminine, one is assumed to desire men. If one desires men, one should act feminine. Marjorie Garber describes the conflation of transvestism and homosexuality in Vested Interests: «In mainstream culture it appears just as unlikely that a gay man will be pictured in non-transvestite terms as it is that a transvestite man will be pictured in non-gay terms»[4]. The hegemonic cultural imaginary, she continues, wants to be able to see the difference between gay and straight, and if it sees a difference it wants to interpret it: a man in a dress or an effeminate man is gay.

Cultures, subcultures, and individuals react to this pressure to conflate gender and sexual orientation in various ways. One strategy is to use gender presentation in pursuit of sexual objects. A counter strategy is to disengage the two categories. Sedgwick describes the relation of gender and same-sex desires in terms of the contradictory tropes of gender transitivity and gender separatism. Gender transitivity encodes same-sex desire in terms of «the trope of inversion, *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa* – 'a woman's soul trapped in a man's body' – and vice versa»[5]. Today this sounds to us much more like a transperson than a homosexual. The contradictory counterpart is the trope of gender separatism, according to which nothing is more natural than that people of the same gender should bond sexually as well as socially. Gay men should be hypermasculine, less like women, since they like women less. These two tropes appear at different times and in different ways,

[2] Eve Sedgwick, «Queer and Now», in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke U. Pr., 1993), 8.
[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (NY: Routledge, 1990), 22.
[4] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests* (NY: Harper Perennial, 1993), 130.
[5] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U. Cal. Pr., 1990), 87.

sometimes simultaneously and in conflict.

Historical examples of gender transitivity would include the 19th century sexological concept of the invert, Radclyffe Hall's mannish lesbian, and the molly houses of eighteenth century England, where men dressed as women sought sex with other men. Gender transitivity also underlies drag and the use of feminine language and names by gay men. Gender separatism sometimes appears as a reaction against the conflation of gender and sexual orientation that gender transitivity implies. US gay activists before Stonewall policed dress codes for their demonstrations, for example: women had to wear dresses, men suits. Gay men in the 1970s developed the clone look: jeans, t-shirt, leather jacket, mustache – all visible signs of masculinity[6]. Radical feminists described themselves as 'woman-identified women' – sometimes aligning their sexual orientation with their gender politics, as opposed to vice versa. Gender separatism can result in exclusions: of biological men from women's music festivals, for example. Even this summer in Montreal there was conflict over the presence of women in a leather bar[7]. Exclusion of the 'opposite sex' in one case creates a safe deheterosexualized space, in the other a sexualized space.

Perhaps most interesting are the instances in which the tropes of gender transitivity and gender separatism come into play at the same time. George Chauncey writes about the coexistence in New York in the first half of the 20th century of effeminate working class fairies who encoded their sexuality by inverting their gender identity and middle class queers who were increasingly uncomfortable with them. The fairies adopted women's names and mannerisms, and having sex with them did not threaten the masculinity of working class men. The middle class queers, on the other hand, increasingly subscribed to a division into homosexual and heterosexual identity, which meant that any man who had sex with men, no matter what gender they performed or who played what sexual role, was identified as homosexual and potentially stigmatized[8]. Lillian Faderman describes a similar distinction in lesbian cultures of the 1940s and 1950s between working class lesbians, who adopted butch / femme identities (gender transitivity) and middle class assimilationists and later lesbian feminists, who objected to butch / femme identities[9].

[6] Interestingly sometimes the signs of sexual orientation are inscribed directly on the body, jumping over the gender performance: 19th century sexologists thought they could read the physical signs of sexual inversion in, for example, the homosexual male's enlarged buttocks. Conversely, today's circuit boys go beyond dress to construct their shirtless bodies as sculpted cookie-cutter signs of their gayness.

[7] «Rant Line», *Montreal Mirror*, Vol. 20, Nos. 50 & 51 (June 9-15 & 16-22, 2005).

[8] George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (NY: Basic Books, 1994).

[9] Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (NY: Penguin, 1991).

The memoirs from Beograd show a similar conflict between gender-transitive and gender-separatist discourses in circulation. Vjeran Miladinović's Terezin sin (2001) reveals the author's adventures as Merlinka, «*najpoznatiji balkanski transvestit*»[10] – the most famous transvestite in the Balkans. Merlinka was the star of Želimir Žilnik's anti-war film Dupe od mramora (Marble Ass, 1994). Before I read the book, Shebar Windstone wrote me that she was collaborating on a memorial page for Merlinka on the Serbian website Queeria, but was «currently hung up over which gender / pronouns to use. Peđa refers to Merlinka as a gay male or 'he', while I say she's a she! (But what do I know? – I never met her, haven't yet read her autobiography or seen her films, and have never been to Belgrade ... only know … what we in New York or the USA consider 'transgender' might not be so in Belgrade / Serbia)»[11]. I will try to be very careful with the pronouns.

The author of the book is designated as Vjeran, and he uses the male pronoun through much, though not all, of the first-person account. And he does identify as a gay man, or rather a male homosexual, «*homoseksualac*». He begins with his childhood, but also describes adolescent crushes, army service, and the discovery of men who love men in Beograd. Most of the book, though, is devoted to his career as a transvestite prostitute from 1989 until the NATO bombings ten years later. The feminine gender appears first when Vjeran encounters another gay man named Rade in the army: «*Rade je voleo muškarce kao i ja, po nekoj našoj logici bili smo sestre. Voleli smo se naravno kao sestre, jadale jedna drugoj i pričale o vojnicima koji nam se sviđaju.*» [Rade loved men like I did, by a certain logic of ours we were sisters. We loved each other just like sisters, complained to one another and talked about the soldiers we liked.] (23). English cannot do this sentence justice. Serbian shows gender in the past tense verb forms, even for plurals. Here the masculine form is maintained for «we were sisters» and «we loved each other», but slips into feminine at «complained to one another and talked about the soldiers we liked». It was Rade who inducted Vjeran into the art of acting gay, which for these sisters meant using feminine gesture, voice, and language: «*Erotičan glas, femkanje, kolutanje očima, sve u strogo ženskom rodu – za mene do tada nepoznat način komuniciranja između dva muškarca.*» [An erotic voice, effeminacy, rolling the eyes, everything strictly in the feminine gender – all this had been unknown to me up to then as a way of communicating between two men.] (23). However, Vjeran does not stop at feminine gestures and language.

[10] Vjeran Miladinović alias Merlinka, *Poslednji intervju dat nedeljniku SVET* (http://www.queeria.org.yu/merlinka/merlinka-srpski06.htm, 18/08/05).
[11] Personal correspondence, 20/09/04.

In Beograd Vjeran and his friends gradually take on more and more feminine markers: «*Počeli smo* […] *ponašati se kao žene*.» [We began to act like women.] (31). Now the use of feminine language forms is explained in terms of an aesthetic that is more pleasing to Vjeran and company and the men they want to attract: «*Da bi nam bilo interesantnije, lepše i njima i nama, počele smo da između sebe govorimo u ženskom rodu*». [So it would be more interesting, more beautiful for them and for us, we began to speak among ourselves in the feminine gender.] (31). Here again the gender slips from masculine («we began to act like women») to feminine («we began to speak in the feminine gender»). Vjeran claims that the feminine gender is adopted in order to attract men: «*Ako nas muškarci žele kao muškarce, da probamo kako će na nas reagovati kada se našminkamo i obučemo slično ženama*.» [If men desire us as men, we wanted to try and see how they would react to us when we put on make-up and dressed like women.] (33).

Vjeran/Merlinka is careful about using or not using the feminine with first person forms. In describing an arrest for prostitution, she begins «*Na stanicu sam otišla oko pola devet. Pišem u ženskom rodu jer sam obukla žensku garderobu*.» [I went out to the station around 8:30. I'm writing in the feminine gender, since I had put on women's clothes.] (122). In this case, grammar follows clothing. In the same passage the vice squad officer Petar Peslać also uses feminine forms to refer to Merlinka (123). In another passage, the mother of Sanela, Merlinka's friend and another transvestite prostitute, discovers that her daughter has become an addict and confronts her in the street: «*Da li si, sine, dospela dotle da se drogiraš*?» [Have you, son, come so far as to take drugs?] (149). The juxtaposition of the masculine vocative «*sine*» (son) with the feminine form in the second person is very jarring.

The constitution of a feminine subject is accompanied on the linguistic level by naming. Garber points out that, unlike the transsexual who may wish to literalize the fantasy of a core identity by altering the body, «the transvestite keeps the fantasy in play, though often in a ritualized way, by deploying a rhetoric of clothing, naming, and performance, or acting out»[12]. The transvestite prostitutes all have feminine names: Merlinka, Sanela, Likana, Greta. The process of naming itself takes on significance as a sign of ritual initiation into the feminine gender. In one passage Likana, who becomes a kind of pimp for younger transvestite prostitutes, is described as their «*kuma*» (godmother): «*Nećete se ljutiti da vam ja dam ženska imena? Prihvatate da vam ja budem kuma*?» [You won't be mad if I give you women's names? Do you accept me as your godmother?] (153). Thus Idriz, Bekrim, and Besim

[12] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests* (NY: Harper Perennial, 1993), 134.

become Begija, Silvana, and Suzana. Likana even stresses the ritual nature of this process. When one of her *protegés* objects that her name (Begija) is not Serbian, Likana replies that according to custom (*po običaju*), when the *kuma* gives a name it has to remain (153).

Vjeran/Merlinka exploits the name to question the very process of identity formation. He can write a sentence in which both names appear implicitly or explicitly. Here Vjeran is the subject implied by the masculine form, while Merlinka is the object of knowledge: «*Na žalost Merlinku sam upoznao 1989. godine, kada sam imao 31 godinu* [...] *Ponosan sam što poznajem Merlinku, verujte mi, bez nje bi mi život bio beskrajno prazan*.» [Unfortunately I met Merlinka in 1989, when I was 31 [...] I am proud that I know her, believe me, without her my life would have been infinitely empty.] (146). An interview for Nin magazine reveals just how unstable both names and genders can be: «*Danju sam Vjeran, a noću Merlinka i zato ponekad pobrkam kada treba da govorim u muškom, a kada u ženskom rodu*.» [In the day I am Vjeran, and at night Merlinka and that's why I am sometimes confused when I should speak about myself in the masculine, and when in the feminine gender.][13]. Name and gender depend on the time of day.

According to Butler, gender is a performatively constituted illusion[14]. Many of her disciples seized on her description of drag as an example of the performative construction of gender, but Butler herself later clarified that «the reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake». «Performance», she writes, «as a bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'»[15]. Drag performance instead merely lays bare the constructed nature of performatively produced gender. Merlinka's account frequently returns to the idea of performance: the illusion of gender is constantly challenged. Yet this is performance and not performativity, a performance bounded in both place and time: Vjeran is Merlinka at night and at the station.

Vjeran consistently describes his performance in terms of actors and a stage: «*Taj parkić, kojeg sam obožavao, bio je pozorište u kome su svi bili publika i glumci*.» [That little park, which I loved, was a theater in which everyone was the audience and the actors.] (30). With his own family, however, he performs masculinity, which, though required by them, he describes in

[13] V. S. «Odlazak Merlinke», Nin online at http://www.queeria.org.yu/merlinka/merlinka-srpski01.htm.
[14] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (NY: Routledge, 1990), 134-141.
[15] Judith Butler, «Critically Queer», *GLQ* Vol. 1, No. 1, 24.

terms of a conscious choice: «*Ja sam, odlazeći kod mojih, morao da glumim muškarca i dobro vodim računa šta pričam*.» [When I went home to my folks I had to play a man and pay close attention to what I said.] (176). If drag at the station is a bounded performance, Vjeran is aware that the gender associated with his ostensibly natural 'core identity' is equally performed.

Vjeran's description of his own performance, in which Vjeran as subject constructs or creates Merlinka as object, remains voluntarist and bounded in space and time. Butler writes of the mistaken conflation of drag and gender performativity, the misapprehension «that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will wear today»[16]. Vjeran claims to do exactly that, even referring to himself as Merlinka's «creator» («*tvorac*», 273). He also lays claim to a stable core identity of his own: «*Moje ja je uvek bilo prisutno u meni. Merlinka nije mogla, ma koliko se ulepšavala, da zaseni Vjerana. Nije mogla da ga kupi novcem*.» [My I was always present in me. Merlinka, no matter how much she made herself beautiful, could not overshadow Vjeran. She could not buy him for money.] (134). This passage, which places Merlinka in the subject position with Vjeran as the object, is only possible if it is negated. Yet while Vjeran may not be overshadowed by Merlinka, both identities are elsewhere described as roles: «*Imao sam dvostruki teret u životu, igrao sam dve sasvim različite uloge, kao muškarac i žena*.» [I had a double burden in life, I played two completely different roles, as a man and a woman.] (137).

While Vjeran's presumably masculine 'I' is not described as discursively produced, the 'I' of his friend Likana is another story. Unlike Vjeran, Likana is never referred to by a male name or male pronouns. Vjeran writes that Likana did not know what she looked like as a man or as a woman, because her makeup and wigs constantly changed. «*To bedno stanje, to gubljenje samog sebe kao muškarca i žene, važilo je za sve transvestite, osim mene i Grete. Likana je bila najbolji primer kako neko može da izgubi kontakt sa samim sobom*.» [That impoverished state, that loss of oneself as a man and a woman, was valid for all the transvestites except me and Greta. Likana was the best example of how someone could lose contact with his own self.] (174). Likana's lack of 'self' does appear to confirm Butler's assertion that that very 'self' may be an effect rather than a cause of gendered performativity. As Butler writes, «That the gendered body is performative, suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that

[16] Judith Butler, «Critically Queer», 21.

if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and a function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject»[17]. The illusion of interiority is, furthermore, discursively produced through a «decidedly public and social discourse», in Likana's case as well. As Vjeran describes it, Likana's 'I' is constituted through her interaction with others: «*Ona je sebe doživljavala kroz druge*.» [She experienced herself through others.] (174).

It is Likana who most explicitly articulates the logic of constructing gendered identity on the basis of sexual orientation or sexual object choice. If for unexamined heteronormative discourse gender follows 'naturally' from biological sex and sexual desire follows equally 'naturally' from gender, for the transvestite prostitutes, gender performance is an effect of sexual desire. Likana interrogates her new *protegés*: «*Ti voliš muškarce? I to muškarce koji vole da jebu druge muškarce? Znači i ti si žena, kao i ja*.» [You like men? And you like men who like to fuck other men? That means you too are a woman, like me.] (165). Likana manages to say all this and more without using the masculine gender for herself or calling herself a man directly. Yet she still denies she is a «real woman»: «*Ja nisam prava žena, ja sam kao i ti, samo nosim žensku garderobu*.» [I am not a real woman, I am just like you, only I wear women's clothes.] (165). To prove her point Likana has Ceca put her hand in her panties, where Ceca feels what Vjeran calls her clitoris: «*Likanin klitoris, dužine oko dvanaest santimetara u spuštenom stanju*» [about 12cm long in its nonerect state] (165). These are chicks with dicks, as we are constantly reminded (even if Sanela does want to cut hers off and throw it in the sewer).

In another scene Likana uses her penis to reclaim her masculine identity in order to control an unruly john who wants a refund because he can't get it up. Likana is protecting Jelena, a biologically female prostitute who works with her. The instability of gender and sexuality in this exchange makes for a dramatic and hilarious scene. Likana first tells the john to leave Jelena alone, referring to her as «my wife»: «*Ti si lezbejka*?» [You are a lesbian?] «*Ne, nego muškarčina! Hoćeš da te jebem, kad već ne može da ti se digne*?» [No, a man! You want me to fuck you, since you can't get it up?]. To prove her point, she has the john put his hand in her panties. «*Pa ona ima stvarno kurac! Šta se ovde dešava*?» [She really does have a dick! What's happening here?]. Likana then addresses Jelena as if she were a man: «*Idi brate*» [Come on brother] and suggests they fuck the john, and Jelena

[17] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 136.

warns him that her cock is even bigger than his («*ali te upozoravam da je moj kurac veći od njegovog*») (161). The john first assumes they are both women (and lesbians), but by the end of the scene he is convinced they are both men who have dicks and are out to fuck him.

For Merlinka, the performance of feminine gender is dictated by her desire to be fucked by men. She remains biologically male (perhaps even visibly male: Likana cattily says that you can see from a mile away that she's a man – «*kome se sa kilometer vidi da je muško*», 154); but because she desires sex with men she performs femininity in dress, gesture, and language. Neither Sedgwick nor Butler really complicates the third category of sexual orientation or sexual object choice, yet one might ask what exactly it is that is desired, now that the three categories are disentangled. Does one desire an anatomical or biological sex? Does one desire a gender? Or does one desire a sexual orientation?

Vjeran in many passages appears to desire anatomy, specifically big dicks: «*Ja volim kurate muškarce*». [I love hung men.] (244), «*Najvažnije od svega, to što ti je dugačak i debeo.*» [Most important of all is that it is long and thick.] (259). Yet elsewhere he distances himself from «homosexuals» by saying that what he really likes is a man's gender performance, the way he acts, which he has to attract by acting a certain way himself: «*Voleo sam stil kod muškaraca, njihova muževnost, koja je zračila iz njihove same ličnosti* […] *Znao sam da svakog muškarca do koga mi je bilo stalo, treba osvojiti svojim ponašanjem.*» [I loved the very style of men, their masculinity, which emanated from their very persona […] I knew that any man I had taken an interest in had to be won by my own behavior.] (29). This masculinity (*muževnost*) appears to be a gender which even emanates (*zračila*) from their very core identity (*ličnost*). So Vjeran desires both the biological sex (the cock) and the gender. What about sexual orientation? Well, he explicitly excludes homosexuals, at least usually.

«*Ja strašno mrzim način života i ponašanja kod homoseksualaca. Nikada u životu nisam odlazio u javne toalete u kojima bih sebi tražio partnera.*» [I really hate the way of life and behavior of homosexuals. Never in my life have I gone into public toilets to seek partners for myself.] (29). She hates the homosexual way of life and the way they seek sex – «the homosexual lifestyle». Merlinka's partners are presumed to be straight men who don't know she's a chick with a dick. In other passages, though, Merlinka herself identifies with the term «fag». During the 1999 bombings, the younger prostitutes call the NATO pilots «fags» («*pederi*»). Merlinka chides them: «*Jao, što je to ružno! Pa mi vređamo same sebe*!» [Oh, how ugly! We're insulting ourselves!] (229) to which Ceca responds, «*Mi nismo pederi, mi*

smo žene.» [We're not fags, we're women.] (229).

Merlinka and the transvestite prostitutes in Beograd enact the trope of gender transitivity in their conception of gay identity. If one desires men, one must act feminine. But this was not the only conception of gay identity available in Beograd at the time. Uroš Filipović's Staklenac shows that the discourse of gender separatism was not unknown in Beograd in the 1980s and 1990s. Staklenac is a kind of erotic diary. Uroš writes that he started it in 1985 when his longtime friend Đura became Yugoslavia's first AIDS patient. Most of the entries are given a date and a title and describe discrete sexual encounters with various men. Uroš is a pseudonym. Parts of the diary were published in English translation as Serbian Diaries by an author named «Boris Davidovich»[18] and parts of that were earlier published by the Serbian gay rights group, Arkadija, under yet another name. In this case, naming is not connected with gender difference; rather the pseudonym serves only to closet the author and protect him from repercussions. He claims to have moved to London in 1993 and to be writing from there when Staklenac is published in 2002.

Uroš's conception of homosexuality is diametrically opposed to Merlinka's. For him, as he tells an inquisitive policeman, having sex with a man does not make him feel less masculine (*manje muževnim*). Instead he feels twice as masculine (*osećam se dvostruko muževnije*) (71-72). Since a man is both stronger and more masculine than a woman, fucking a man is by that very fact more masculine than fucking a weak woman (72). While he is aware of the trope of inversion, of homosexuals who dress as women or use feminine language, he disapproves strongly: «*Ja u principu mrzim sve te kemp travestije i feminizirano ponašanje. Muškarci prerušeni u žene me seksualno odbijaju i gade mi se*.» [In principle I hate all that camp transvestism and feminized behavior. Men disguised as women repulse me sexually and disgust me.] (87). In one scene he visits a friend's apartment and pretends to laugh at jokes told in the feminine gender, but he leaves soon thereafter (286).

On one level, the sex object desired by Uroš is the same one desired by Vjeran/Merlinka: the heterosexual man. For both, desire is defined not merely in terms of sex or gender, but sexual orientation. According to Uroš most homosexuals are not interested in seducing another homosexual, which he compares to a «risk-free hunt for a tame animal» as opposed to heterosexuals: «*Lov na heteroseksualce je opasan lov na divlje zveri, sa potpuno neizvesnim ishodom*.» [The hunt for heterosexuals is a dangerous hunt for wild animals, with a completely unknown result.] (183). Some of Uroš's partners are hustlers – he participates in commercial sex just as Merlinka does,

[18] Boris Davidovich, *Serbian Diaries* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1996).

though as a customer, rather than a provider. The rent boys are conceived of as gay for pay: their willingness to have sex with men is an effect of economic necessity, rather than sexual desire. Uroš's friend Milija, who facilitates these transactions, polices the boys, becoming irate if they have sex with each other, which destroys the illusion of their heterosexuality. They are «real men»: «*Mladići koji dolaze kod njega nisu pederi, već 'pravi muškarci' koji to rade sa starijima isključivo za lovu*.» [The boys who come to his place aren't fags, but rather 'real men' who do it with older men only for the dough.] (219). At a minimum, the «real man» must appear masculine, which Uroš describes in terms of some inner masculine identity: «*Za mene muškarac mora i spolja i iznutra da izgleda kao pravi muškarac*.» [For me a man has to look both inside and outside like a real man.] (216)[19].

In a sense, for Uroš, sex with a straight man is about reversing the usual power dynamic, in which straight men are placed higher than both women and (potentially feminized) gay men. In the 'interview' that concludes the book, he explains that his biggest turn-on is to fuck or be sucked by a macho man or a soldier, which amounts to a symbolic devirilization: «*Nisu me privlačili lepotom, već nekakvom super-muževnošću koju sam želeo da ponižavam i devirilizujem* […] *To je stalno ta simbolička igra devirilizacije drugog muškarca*.» [They didn't attract me with their beauty, but with a kind of hypermasculinity that I wanted to humiliate and devirilize […] It's always the symbolic game of devirilization of another man.] (371). He even speculates that the erotic pleasure of this power reversal flows from a kind of revenge on the straight world: «*Da li se tako simbolički svetim heteroseksualnim, muževnim muškarcima zato što nisam kao oni, da li na taj način želim da ih pripitomim i identifikujem se sa njima?*» [Am I symbolically taking revenge on heterosexual masculine men because I am not like them, do I want in this way to tame them and identify myself with them?] (371). He is not like them – not straight, but through sex he identifies with them as masculine.

In the 'interview' Uroš explains homosexuality in a way that is clearly gender-separatist, and explicitly distinct from the trope of inversion: «*Homoseksualnost je u nekom čistom idealnom obliku međusobna privlačnost koju osećaju dva muževna, a ne dva feminizirana muškarca ili travestita*.» [Homosexuality is in some pure ideal form the mutual attraction felt by two masculine men, rather than two feminized men or transvestites.] (364). Homosexuality appears to be exclusively

[19] Curiously, though his descriptions sound like rough trade, Uroš also idealizes hairless bodies (perhaps because his earliest fantasies were engendered by Greek statues). Again and again he points out that his ideal sex object is one «*bez jedne jedine dlačice*» [without a single hair] (99, 121, 173).

male. Uroš's claim to a kind of higher value for the gender-separatist model echoes a passage of Halperin's One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, which also makes a kind of plea to view this model as more evolved, or more modern: «The emergence of homosexuality out of inversion, the formation of a sexual orientation independent of relative degrees of masculinity and femininity, takes part during the latter part of the nineteenth century and comes into its own only in the twentieth. Its highest expression is the 'straight-acting and -appearing gay male', a man distinct from other men in absolutely no other respect besides that of his 'sexuality'»[20]. Yet the history of sexuality need not be viewed as a kind of progress or evolution towards this «highest expression». Chauncey and Faderman show that two models can exist simultaneously, often in tension. In the case of Beograd, it is useful to consider what Uroš and Merlinka think of each other's worlds, what Uroš writes about transvestites and effeminate gays, and what Merlinka writes about non-effeminate homosexuals.

For Uroš the transvestites who sleep with men are a different category altogether. Of one named Kleopatra he says «*Kleopatra nije homoseksualac, on/ona je travestit ili transseksualac. On je, znači, muškarac u ženskom obličju, a to je veoma važna razlika*.» [Kleopatra is not a homosexual, he/she is a transvestite or a transsexual. That means he is a man in a woman's form, and that is a very important difference.] (364). Furthermore the men who sleep with transvestite prostitutes are not homosexuals either, but heterosexuals. Transvestites do not try to pick up homosexuals. Uroš repeats the common discourse that transvestites are more acceptable to straight people because they do not challenge patriarchal gender roles, but instead inscribe homosexuality into the known trope of gender subordination[21]. «*Mislim da je balkanskom mačo mentalitetu lakše da proguta muškarca obučenog u ženu kao sinonim za homoseksualca, nego potpuno muževnog muškarca, koji je homoseksualac. Feminizirani muškarac je lakše prihvatljiv, jer za njega postoji referenca – žena, on je dakle svodljiv na nešto poznato – ženu. Kao takav, on je tragikomično niže biće, potčinjen, pasivan kao žena i otvoren za penetraciju mužjaka*.» [I think that it is easier for Balkan macho mentality to swallow a man dressed as a woman as a synonym for a homosexual than a completely masculine man who is a homosexual. A feminized man is easier to accept, because there is a reference for him – a woman, he is therefore reducible to something known – a woman.

[20] David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, (NY: Routledge, 1990), 9.
[21] Butler would disagree. She writes that the presence «of so-called heterosexual conventions within homosexual contexts […] cannot be explained as chimerical representations of originally heterosexual identities. And neither can they be understood as the pernicious insistence of heterosexist constructs within gay sexuality and identity». *Gender Trouble*, 31.

As such he is a tragicomically inferior being, subordinate, passive like a woman and open to penetration by the man.] (364). While he writes that Balkan men may find the straight-acting and – appearing gay man harder for a straight man to «swallow» (his word), he does admit that the transvestite's inferior position also allows her to be the object of ridicule and violence.

Up to a point, Vjeran would agree with Uroš, and he does say that life as a woman was so hard that he decided against an operation to become a MTF transsexual (70). Merlinka has as much contempt, though, for the homosexuals who cruise the public toilets as Uroš does for effeminate gays and transvestites. When they took over a little park, they drove out the homosexuals: «*Toliko smo daleko otišle, da smo odredile koliko puta sme neko od pedera da ide u klozet. Neposlušne, matore homoseksualce, eliminisali smo na taj način što smo slali naše mladiće da ih oteraju iz parka*.» [We went so far as to establish how many times a fag could enter the toilet. We eliminated the disobedient old homosexuals by sending our boyfriends to drive them out of the park.] (31). Foucault would no doubt have made much of this policing of one part of the (theoretical) queer community by another through abjection, literally 'elimination'! Upstanding transvestite prostitutes clean up their park by eliminating those dirty homos who cruise the toilets, thereby solidifying their own identity as morally superior and less threatening to public order.

Uroš, on the other hand, would win popularity with the heterosexual majority by eliminating effeminate homosexuals from public view. In Serbian Diaries he writes of an effeminate gay man who was a spokesperson in an early public forum on gay rights. He refers to him as an ignoramus, uneducated, «a disgraceful effeminate guy» straight from a village in Bosnia (10-11). «I can't get rid of my dislike for effeminate homosexuals. When I see them I feel ashamed of being gay» (12). They confirm the hegemonic straight view of homosexuality, in other words: the trope of gender transitivity. He excludes them from homosexual identity altogether: «I do not regard effeminate gays as 'true and normal homosexuals', and I often feel the need to challenge their right to represent us gay men» (12). «Us gay men» now excludes effeminate homosexuals. He criticizes the late Dejan Nebrigić for his effeminate behavior, even as he recognizes him as one of the pioneers of gay activism in Serbia. According to Uroš he was a «professional homo» who «*svojim feminiziranim ekscesnim ponašanjem* […] *doprinosio potvrđivanju najgorih predrasuda heteroseksualnog establišmenta vezanog za homoseksualce*» [by his outrageous feminine behavior helped confirm the worst prejudices of the heterosexual establishment about homosexuals] (377).

Of course, most of the policing of gender and sexuality in both memoirs is done by the ostensibly heterosexual and male

world. Homosexuals, transvestites, and prostitutes are subject to verbal and physical attack, as well as police regulation and arrest, as both memoirs attest. Uroš fears to go to the police after he is robbed and stabbed by a trick. Merlinka is arrested and spends time in prison, and one of her friends is gang-raped when the johns find she has a dick. Tragically, Vjeran himself was brutally murdered in 2003, a crime that has still apparently not been solved.

For the transvestites, their safety relies to an extent on the ignorance of their johns about their biological or anatomical sex. There is a constant threat of revelation. When they begin to encroach on the territory of biologically female prostitutes, the latter forbid them entry into their park and tell their customers they are «fags» («*pederi*») (65). Later disgruntled neighbors do the same thing. The transvestites even beat up one man for persistently going after johns and telling them that the transvestites are men (77). At the same time two things undermine the illusion of heterosexual 'normality'. For one thing, they take regular lovers whom they call «*jebači*» or «fuckers». Customers pay the transvestite prostitutes for sex, but the «*jebači*» are instead supported by them (though at times they seem to be jealously locked up at home by their partners). Vjeran describes them in terms that further destabilize the normative idea of a 'woman' by splitting it into different types. The «*jebači*» are boys «*koji vole tu vrstu žena, to jest znaju, ali im ne smeta, šta imaju među nogama*» [boys who love that type of women, that is they know what they have between their legs, but it doesn't bother them] (156). While Likana can say that she is not «a real woman» («*nisam prava žena*»), here Vjeran would categorize her as a «type of woman» – just one that has something between her legs.

Uroš's simplistic construction would have it that Merlinka's clients are heterosexual men. But Vjeran calls even this into question. Their heterosexual straight masculinity, like Merlinka's femininity (and presumed biological female heterosexual identity) is also a performance. It is no accident when Vjeran writes that the park where they met men was a theater where «EVERYONE [my emphasis – KM] was actors and audience» (30). The johns, just like the prostitutes, had to play their role without breaking the illusion: «*Više su ti koji su dolazili glumili, od nas koji smo se kurvali.*» [Those who came were acting more than we who were tricking.] (137). Their ignorance about the transvestite's biological sex, which might call their own sexuality into question, was an act. They were pretending, says Merlinka, «not to know what I am»: «*praveći da ne znaju šta sam* […] *Jasno im je svima šta mi imamo u gaćama*» [It was clear to all of them what we had in our pants] (137). Here the penis becomes the index of identity: what we have in our pants defines what we are – in Merlinka's case a homosexual transvestite prostitute.

Vjeran/Merlinka's understanding of identity and performance is complex and nuanced, and he gets a kind of erotic thrill out of keeping the signifiers in play, slipping from one gender to another in mid-sentence or referring if only by denial to himself or Likana as a lesbian. He even refers to a customer reaching in to feel Likana's 20 cm clitoris, ascribing impressive female anatomy to what we might call a pre-op or rather non-op transsexual. Uroš's schema of identities is much more binary: men / women, masculine / feminine, lesbian / gay.

Uroš's chapter on transvestism at play, Igra travestije, reveals this simple schema. First he tells the story of Lana, a short-haired lesbian he encountered at a meeting of Arkadija, the Serbian gay rights group. On a train to Prague Lana was read by a boy she shared her compartment with as a male, and they traded stories of seducing women. According to Uroš, although he doesn't put it this way, she was biologically female, presenting as masculine, and a lesbian. Her pleasure in the encounter came from destabilizing the boy's expectations of gender and hence sexual orientation: first she relished the secret of her 'true' biological sex, then she came out by meeting a girlfriend with the same masculine look: «*Užitak ne bi bio potpun da je frajer ostao u zabludi. Zbog toga je rešila da mu, na kraju putovanja, otkrije istinu.*» [The pleasure would not have been complete if the guy remained deceived. Therefore she decided to reveal the truth to him at the end of the trip.] (214). The rhetoric of deception / truth reveals the weight Uroš places on sex and sexual orientation, as opposed to gender performance in this scene. Sex and sexual orientation are «the truth» while gender performance is «deception».

A second encounter with transvestism puts Uroš's own identity into question, and he finds it deeply unsettling. He spotted an attractive boy of about 19 («*zgodnog mladića od oko devetnaest godina*», 215), cruised him, and followed him into a porn theater. Uroš sat next to him and began to feel for the boy's cock, which wasn't there: «*ni traga od penisa!*» [not a trace of a penis!]. When he started to open the boy's fly, he found out why: «*Blago mi je zadržao ruku i šapnuo na uvo: 'Znaš, ja sam žensko'.*» [Fortunately he stopped my hand and whispered into my ear, 'you know, I'm a woman'.] (215). The gender of all the verbs is masculine. For once, Uroš is shocked, particularly when she (as the gender now switches to feminine) invites him to her place. He doesn't go, and he later regrets his cowardice.

Most interesting, though, are Uroš's ruminations over the identity and intentions of this handsome boy / girl. He now uses only the feminine gender and analyzes the encounter in terms of the binaries male / female and lesbian / straight: «*Šta je kratko ošišana devojka u muškoj odeći tražila u bioskopu Partizan gde se okupljaju homoseksualci? Ako je lezbejka, šta traži na mestu gde*

se okupljaju samo muškarci? Ako nije lezbejka, šta traži u bioskopu gde devedeset posto publike čine homoseksualci?» [What was a short-haired girl in men's clothes looking for in the Partizan theater where homosexuals gather? If she's a lesbian, what is she looking for in a place where only men gather? If she's not a lesbian, what is she looking for in a theater where homosexuals comprise 90% of the public?] (216). Either / or: either she's a man or a woman, and since she doesn't have a penis, she must be a woman. Either / or: either she's a lesbian, in which case why is she cruising men? Or she's a straight woman, in which case why is she cruising homosexuals? For Uroš, it seems, the three categories we started with, biological / anatomical sex, gender performance, and sexual orientation, are not fully disentangled. The possibility that this attractive boy is a female to male transgender homosexual, a biological female who performs masculinity while desiring sex with other men, does not even occur to him. If Uroš can desire heterosexual men, why can't this boy / girl desire homosexual men? Since we only have Uroš's account, we will never know how this boy conceives of his or her own identity.

Why does Vjeran prefer the trope of gender transitivity, while Uroš prefers gender separatism? Perhaps class has something to do with it. Chauncey and Faderman found that gender transitivity among working class men and women coexisted and came into conflict with a gender-separatist model espoused by the middle class. Certainly many of the transvestite prostitutes in Vjeran's circle seem to be working class. Uroš, on the other hand, claims superiority over those who haunt the station: he is, after all, a university professor. Unlike them, he knows gay culture: «*Oni nikada nisu čuli za reč gej*, […] *ništa ne znaju o Židu, Prustu, Kavafiju, Pesoi ili Mišimi.*» [They have never heard of the word gay, […] don't know anything about Gide, Proust, Cavafy, Pessoa, or Mishima.] (370). They don't even know the local gay subculture, with its bars, magazine, and website. Perhaps, to put a different spin on the same phenomenon, Vjeran and company are merely less colonized by hegemonic Western models of homosexuality. While Vjeran travels outside Yugoslavia only once to visit his mother in Berlin, Uroš and his friends travel frequently and immerse themselves in gay culture abroad. He describes adventures in Switzerland, Moscow, Alexandria, Ulan Bator, and San Francisco, so it is no accident his conception of homosexual identity resembles the gender-separatist model more common in the West.

Vjeran and Uroš also differ along the axis of politics, though there is some overlap here. They both seem immune to the strong claims of national identity circulating in Serbian culture in the 1980s and 1990s. For Vjeran, nationality, ethnicity, and religion are at the very least not a reason for exclusion: «*Ja i*

Sanela smo bili Srbi, Likana i Greta pravoslavni Romi, a Šeherezada, Rom muslimanske veroispovesti. Mi smo bile neopterećene ko je koje vere, narodnosti, imali smo nešto zajedničko, što nas je neraskidivo držalo, a to je da smo sve volele muškarce.» [Sanela and I were Serbs, Likana and Greta Orthodox Roma, and Šeherezada a Muslim Roma. We were not burdened by who was what religion or nationality, we had something in common, something that inseparably bound us together, the fact that we all liked men.] (69). If Vjeran is «unburdened» by religion and nationality, Uroš is politicized against national and religious exclusions by sex, or so he claims. He considers nationalism a primitive and harmful atavism, and himself «above nationality» («*nadnacionalan*») as a *citoyen du monde* (he uses French in his Serbian text here) (118). It was sex that made him this way: «*U mom slučaju značajan doprinos anti-nacionalističkom stavu imao je seks. Ukoliko mi se neki frajer dopada, ne tiče mi se šta je, odakle je, kojoj naciji, etničkoj grupi ili plemenu pripada*.» [In my case sex made a significant contribution to my anti-nationalist stance. If I like some guy, I don't care what he is, where he is from, what nation, ethnic group, or tribe he belongs to.] (118). His anti-nationalism makes him quite perceptive about the discourses deployed by nationalist propagandists, particularly when homosexuals were accused of destroying Serbian or Croatian culture as part of some international gay conspiracy, for example, when Kalajić criticized Radio B-92 (the same station, by the way, that financed Žilnik and Merlinka's film Marble Ass), calling the staff «a group of American mercenaries and national defeatists who propagandise homosexuality»[22]. When the war interferes with the supply of fresh hustlers from Bosnia, Uroš regrets the loss. Given that both Vjeran and Uroš identify as Serbs and therefore occupy the most privileged position in the nationalist hierarchy, their claims to indifference may be taken with a grain of salt: would they say the same if they were themselves Albanian, or Roma, or Bosnian Muslim? Vjeran seems less aware of politics than Uroš, and describes himself as apolitical, though he does express some anger at the NATO forces who bomb Beograd. Yet even this is turned by camp humor into another metaphor for fucking: one of her johns says, «*Sad ću da te lično bombardujem od pozadi*!» [Now I'm going to personally bomb you from behind!] (230) and her colleague fat Mira fetishizes being penetrated by a rocket, since at $1 million, a Tomahawk rocket in the right place would be her biggest and most expensive trick (235).

Yet another potential explanation for the differences between Vjeran and Uroš may be sought in the sexual roles they prefer: at least according to their own accounts Vjeran is a bottom, while Uroš is a top. While they do not use the terms top / bottom or

[22] Borba, 1.11.1991, quoted in *Serbian Diaries*, 126.

active / passive, the memoirs contain not one description of Vjeran penetrating another man, or of Uroš being penetrated. Vjeran/Merlinka waxes poetic at descriptions of cocks pulsating in his body: «*Kako je lepo kada neko prodire, pulsira, prska svoju vrelinu, deo sebe u tebe*.» [How beautiful it is when someone penetrates, pulses, spurts his heat, a part of himself into you.] (63). Uroš, on the other hand, rhapsodizes about fucking ostensibly heterosexual men: «*Ja ih gledam kako čuče ili kleče ispred mene otvorenih usta, dok moj piton ulazi u njihove kratko ošišane glave. Uživam da ih gledam kako se trće, kreče, ili dižu noge u vis čekajući da prodrem u njihovu nežnu utrobu.*» [I watch them squat or kneel in front of me with their mouths open, while my python enters their short-cut heads. I take pleasure in watching them squirm, spread their legs, or lift them up waiting for me to penetrate their soft insides.] (177). Given that the penetrated body is normatively read as female, it may be logical that Vjeran should prefer a gender-transitive model for his own sexuality. Even Uroš acknowledges in Serbian Diaries that penetration devirilizes the penetrated partner and «a man who is fucked by another becomes a sort of woman» (100). At the same time he says this devirilization enables him to identify himself with straight men (371). Vjeran, who is fucked by men, constructs through this sexual act a female identity. Uroš, by fucking men, identifies through the act as straight and male.

Vjeran and Uroš would each exclude the other from his identity in order to win the acceptance of the heterosexual majority. Just such a construction allows for the definition of European identity by exclusion of the imagined Balkans, which always begin just across the border: in Vienna, the Slovene border; in Ljubljana, the Croatian border; and in Zagreb, the Serbian border. Vjeran hates what the homophobes call «the gay lifestyle», and Uroš does cruise toilets: his memoir is named for one of the most active, and the cover shows a row of urinals. Uroš, on the other hand, hates effeminacy and excludes transvestites and effeminate gay men from the fraternity of «us gay men». Both of these Balkan memoirs grapple with the heteronormative conflation of gender and sexual orientation. Vjeran exploits the conflation to have sex with men, constructing a gender-transitive identity that is sometimes homophobic. Uroš's gender-separatist identity is sometimes transphobic. He does not disentangle gender and sexual orientation, but instead merely reverses the polarity: sex with men makes him hyper-masculine. The terms are not free floating for either account. Uroš's inability to conceive of a girl dressed as a boy to cruise gay men is a mirror image of Merlinka's reductive logic that if you love men then you must be a woman. Overall these are two voices in the chorus, two accounts of sex, gender, and sexual orientation in the Balkans at the end of the 20th century, both of which reveal in contrasting ways the

power of heteronormative discourse to conduct the music.

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Performance, Performativity, and Gender Identity Subversion in Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Papagena Robbins

Performativity is not to be confused with performance. Performativity is the concept through which the power of a discourse can be seen to make people into its subjects. Performance is the singular act that makes use of a discourse. The concept of performativity helps our understanding of how discourses establish and maintain cultural norms through various compulsory performances. Accordingly, the concept can be used for the purposes of politically critiquing these cultural norms, and marking a space for effective resistance. Critiquing gender and sexual norms is exemplary of this capacity. Indeed, most gender performances serve to disguise the power of performativity in order to maintain the dominant gender norms. My interest lies in those that do not.

What I would like to show is how the film I have selected, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, uses performance in a way that makes performativity conspicuous, and how this conspicuousness of performativity is able to subvert the hegemonic system of gender norms. By saying that the performance 'subverts' the system, I do not mean to say that the performer has the agency to escape or to destroy the system for herself or anyone else. I only mean to say that the performances act upon the system such that it is destabilized within the context of the intersubjective moment between performer and audience, and there is a possibility for that destabilization to go even further. Theories of performativity, dialectics, and the male gaze will be important to my discussion.

Based on an immensely popular, long-running, off-Broadway show in New York City that began in 1994, the film, which was released in 2001, was written and directed by John Cameron Mitchell, who also plays Hedwig, and features vibrant music and poignant lyrics by Stephen Trask, both of whom collaborated on the original theatrical piece. Narrated primarily through song and flashback from the point of view of the title character, Hedwig sets her story in motion with a question to her audience: «How did some slip of a girly-boy from Communist East Berlin become the internationally ignored song stylist barely standing before you?». And somewhere in the grimy chain restaurant that is the performance venue, a glass breaks in anticipation. What follows is her journey from Hansel to Hedwig, through a botched sex change operation, immigration to the United States, lost loves, self-expression, and a quest for ontological unity.

I have chosen three musical performances from the film – Tear Me Down, Angry Inch, and Wig in a Box – which I will analyze to see how gender specifically operates in relation to the more

general theory of gender performativity. But first, I will briefly chart the development of the concept of performativity and its domain.

The concept of performativity

The performativity of the speech act first came to be theorized by J.L. Austin in his 1955 lecture How to do Things with Words. Austin makes the distinction between constative utterances, those which make a statement that can be evaluated as either true or false, and performative utterances, those which cannot be evaluated as to their true or false status, but which bring about the circumstances to which they refer[1] (Austin 1962: 3-7). He goes on to divide the speech act into three categories of acts according to their effect: the locutionary act, which is the physical act of saying something; the illocutionary act, which is the act performed by what is said (a promise, or a warning, for instance); and the perlocutionary act, which is the further act of the illocutionary, that is to say, the deeper effect which has been achieved (the person who has been warned reacts by averting danger).

Although valuable to the current conceptualization of performativity, Austin's work is problematic in various ways, which has lead subsequent theorists to challenge some of his specific claims and transform the concept substantially. In doing so, the concept of performativity was reformulated in such a way that it became possible to use it to account for a more diverse range of intelligible acts, such as literature and gender performance. One of the problems with Austin's work, which had to be overcome for this concept to travel to these other domains, was that of his reliance on the authority of the speaker. Taking the concept of performative language from the speech act to the literary utterance overcame this difficulty by showing that all statements made by a character are performative in nature because they create the character in the same moment that they say something relating to the narrative. The appropriation of the performative for literary works also changes the focus of analysis such that texts are seen to be, as Jonathan Culler remarks, «An active, world-making use of language […] that change the world by bringing into being the things that they name» (Culler 2000: 506-7). This is to

[1] For example, when a man is in that act of getting married, the utterance «I do» is performative such that it brings into being the marriage. Conversely, after the performance of the performative wedding vows, the man could report on his situation by saying to the priest «I am now a husband» and this would be a true, constative statement, but would not be the utterance which makes itself true like «I do». It must be noted too that, for Austin, these performative utterances are context dependant. One can say «I do», as many times as one likes, but it will not bring about a marriage unless it is carried out in the proper legal / religious context of marriage.

say that texts do something to us. Further, as Derrida argues, constative utterances can no longer be distinguished from performative ones: every utterance is both. What is more important to consider is the utterance's iterative and citational lineage and potential (Derrida 1988; 1992; as interpreted by Culler 2000: 509-10). Literary language, much like spoken language, creates subjects as an effect of its performative power. This performative power relies on the force of the language's iterability and citationality. For the purposes of my analysis, I propose to include song lyrics in this category of literary language as well.

Perhaps most pertinent to the cultural object at hand is the work of Judith Butler, who further theorizes and extends the domain of performativity to the realm of sex / gender. No longer confined to speech acts and literary works, performativity is extended to acts, gestures, enactments and words as well, which all work together to bring into social being the gendered subject that performs them. These performatives depend upon citationality and iterability for their effect, as well. Performativity, for Butler, is not «the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, [is] that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains» (Butler 1993: 2). Key to Butler's theory is Nietzsche's notion that there is no doer behind the deed. That is, the performer is not the cause of the gender performances, but rather the effect of these performances. The performer is already constituted as one sex or the other at birth, thus the only agency available to him or her within the schema of sex / gender is in the reiteration of gender norms appropriate to his or her sex (Butler 1990: 136, 145).

'Sex' is not a given materialization of the body, however, but the process of sorting bodies into categories of materiality that are governed by regulatory norms and produced through the reiteration of those norms. Moreover, «'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility» (Butler 1993: 2). Accordingly, 'sex' is not just that foundation upon which the gender is fabricated over and above, but is an effect of social discourse from the beginning (Butler 1993: 5).

The ability of regulatory norms to constitute and maintain the subject within their system requires the production of abject beings. These are people who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but are important to the formation of subjects, such that the subject assumes his status in the repudiation of those that do not or cannot uphold the norms properly. To abject is to expel, and in so doing to make unintelligible within the system from whence expelled. There is some power, however, in this abject position: «This disavowed abjection will threaten to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject», and can become

«a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility» (Butler 1993: 3, 243). The subversive power of the abject, however, only becomes truly effective when it is performed as a repetition of normative citations. Butler herself says that «it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible», and thus no singular performance is sufficient to change matters (Butler 1990: 145).

In Culler's discussion of Butler, he remarks that although the literary work is a «singular, specific act», under Butler's model it may contain the power of subversion if it:

> «succeeds, becomes an event, by a massive repetition that takes up norms […] perhaps, effecting an alteration in the norms or the forms through which readers go on to confront the world. A poem may very well disappear without a trace, but it may also trace itself in memories and give rise to acts of repetition. Its performativity, then, is less a singular act accomplished once and for all than a repetition that gives life to forms that it repeats» (Culler 2000: 517).

If it is able to reach many audiences, a film or play is then also well suited to manifest this subversive power, in its capacity to be repeated and reproduced. Therefore, it is possible for the abject to use media in the service of gender subversion.

Considering the performances in Hedwig and the Angry Inch in terms of the concept of performativity allows us to start to look at how both verbal and non-verbal elements relate to the discourse of sex / gender identity: what they are effects of, and what kind of effects they have. The concept of performativity is useful in that it helps us see how important these performances are in challenging the dominating power of heterosexual hegemony.

Gender performances are the specific cases where the performativity of gender (under the terms of heterosexuality as a regulatory norm) is the universal rule. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's conception of G. W. F. Hegel's notion of the determinate negation concerns those cases where the specific, over which the universal ostensibly governs, defies the universal, and exposes it, making its rule conspicuous. The determinate negation both reveals the universalist formula of the observance of a rule, and that the formula is not able to grasp the object in its entirety. Through the determinate negation, a dialectical tension arises, which «discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth» (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002 [1944]: 18). I propose that the determinate negation that makes

the universal of gender as a regulatory ideal conspicuous, and the resulting dialectical tension, is what makes this specific case of gender performance potent. The further repetition of the performance, which is specifically potent, is what makes it significantly subversive on a larger scale, as Culler suggests in the quote above. How this conspicuousness and tension is manifested through the specific performances I have selected will contribute to the analysis of my cultural object as well.

Tear Me Down

Bildgewaters', a national chain of restaurants, are the only venues where Hedwig and her band, the Angry Inch, seem to be able to get a gig – every performance before an audience takes place in a Bildgewaters' restaurant. The audiences are, thus, mainly composed of middle-American captives, and a handful of 'Hed-heads', fans who wear foam replicas of Hedwig's iconic 'do' and who seem to clash with the decidedly humdrum environment. The film begins in this abject setting (for a rock band) with the performance of Tear Me Down, a hard rock tune that introduces Hedwig. In this restaurant setting, she demands to be seen and heard.

As she holds up the sides of her cape, graffitied on the inside with the words «Yankee go home … With me», she begins to sing: «Don't you know me, Kansas City? I'm the new Berlin Wall. Try to tear me down!». The song establishes a link between her failed sex change operation and the building of the Berlin Wall that divided the city (and went up the same year she was born). The Berlin Wall imposed a binary within national and political identitification on a people not previously subjected to this kind of division. Inversely, as a result of her botched sex change, the in-between-ness of Hedwig's body and gender illuminate a binary already socially imposed, but conceived of as natural. As a border, a limit, both Hedwig and the Wall allow people to see where they stand in relation to the other binary. Throughout the performance, some of the restaurant patrons watch with confused expressions; a man covers his ears, others smile and bob their heads.

In explanation of this wall metaphor, Yizak, Hedwig's backup singer and husband, interjects the following speech into the middle of the song:

> Yizak: On August 13th, 1961, a wall was erected down the middle of the city of Berlin. The world was divided by a cold war, and the Berlin Wall was the most hated symbol of that divide. Reviled. Graffitied. Spit upon. We thought the wall would stand forever, and now that it's gone, we don't know who we are anymore. Ladies and Gentlemen, Hedwig is like that wall, standing before you in the divide

between East and West, Slavery and Freedom, Man and Woman, Top and Bottom. And you can try to tear her down, but before you do, you must remember one thing.

Hedwig: Hey. You must know the difference between a bridge and a wall. Without me right in the middle, babe, you would be nothing at all.

Conceiving of Hedwig metaphorically as a «divide between East and West, Slavery and Freedom, Man and Woman, Top and Bottom» reveals the tension between each of these binary oppositions. She is the specific case that illuminates the exclusion of all that exists between binary opposites, that these binaries may be maintained. When Hedwig takes up from where Yizak leaves off, she references the constitutive capacity of these limits. Her existence does not create a link that allows the transgression of borders; rather, it constitutes the border through which definition is possible at all. This is to say that there is no crossing from one side to the other, as with a bridge, without the distinction between one side and the other. But what maintains that distinction, the border, can only be thought of as both or neither of the binaries on either side, which is not allowed in the regulation of norms that create identities. She is there, performatively, within the discourse of gender and sex, but is not afforded the status of subject within it. She is the effect of this discourse, as well as an instrument within it. The unintelligibility of her sex and gender, as an abject being, is what makes people subject to gender norms intelligible within the hegemonic discourse. Hedwig is the very embodiment of dialectical tension between binary opposites, a tension that is so strenuously sublimated into a forced choice between, and maintenance of, one or the other of the binaries.

Hedwig and the band play with zeal, citing the best of rock performances gone by with their posturing and musical skill. The command 'Tear me down' has two different consequences if followed in the context of the song. On the one hand, if Hedwig is viewed as a singular representation of the limits of gender / sexuality, then physically 'tearing her down' (i.e. humiliating her, ruining her, beating her, or killing her) would represent the process of abjection. When people engage with her and try to 'tear her down' in this sense, they are engaging with the limits of their own subjectivities. In rejecting Hedwig and making her abject, they are complying with the heteronormative performativity that requires the abjection of people, like Hedwig, who embody the limits of the gender / sex discourse, in order to create themselves as intelligible subjects. She asks for this engagement in the song, such that the process of abjection, conjured in the imagination of the audience by the song's lyrics, shows its performative nature as

central. On the other hand, if she is understood as a metaphor for a wall that divides people into opposites, then to tear her down is not to reinforce what one is to one side of the wall or the other, but to demolish the division, allowing a free flow between the binaries, and the dissolution of difference. The command 'Tear me down', thus, interpellates the receiver of the utterance as a tenuously composed gendered subject. The words are performative such that they bring into being subjects and abjects (sic) of subjection, which are intimately linked in a kind of agonism – the prize being social recognition. This theme is also evident in the next object of analysis, the song Angry Inch.

Angry Inch

The stage performance of Angry Inch follows a flashback in which Hansel decides to marry Sergeant Luther Robinson in order to escape East Berlin for a better life in America, but is informed that the East German government requires a full medical examination for marriages to non-East Germans. After a little encouragement from his mother and Luther to go ahead with the operation in order to pass as female, Hansel agrees and is rewarded with his mother's name, Hedwig, and her passport. She, thus, in becoming Hedwig, is shown to be an effect of the medical, legal, and social discourses on sex and gender.

In this song, Hedwig recounts the circumstances of her botched sex change operation in vivid detail. She sings the chorus, «Six inches forward and five inches back, I've got an angry inch», which is not just a statement of a change in bodily morphology, but also performs a challenge to how one is to view this particular body's contours in the heteronormative system to which we are all subjected. The 'angry' in the sentence produces the state of affairs to which it refers by signifying the tension between this particular body morphology and the world of discourse the owner of that body is forced to contend with when she discloses the nature of her genitalia.

The lyric «Six inches forward and five inches back» refers to the process of castration, but it also performs as the threat of castration by referencing the discourse of psychoanalysis that permeates many Western cultural narratives. The performative effect of this utterance is to demand a consciousness of that which has been submerged by the unconscious – the fear of losing that which one depends upon for visibility and credibility in the patriarchal social arena, the phallus[2]. This lyric also performs in a citational capacity by being structurally, and thematically similar to

[2] Although I will not focus on a psychoanalytic interpretation involving the theorization of castration here, the connection is so obvious that it is worth mentioning, if only to bring the reader's attention to the richness in the text /

the saying «one step forward, two steps back». In invoking a reference to this saying, a tension is created between the loss of (the majority of) the penis and the performer's attempt at improving her circumstances through this sacrifice.

Towards the end of the performance, a man stands up, goes to Hedwig, and yells «Faggot» in her face. She yells back «I've got an angry inch», and the band jumps into the crowd, creating a brawl as Hedwig continues to sing. While the whole dining room fights, food flies across tables, a waitress runs up to a boy and kisses him, in short, the song becomes a kind of Pandora's box, releasing all of the impulses and desires of those present into full expression. The brawl represents the capacity of the determinate negation to desublimate the tension between the specific and the universal, to make it manifest. Hedwig's act has confronted these people with this tension, which is not ordinarily conscious. The tension is maintained because there is no way for Hedwig's body to be assimilated into the heteronormative system. The audience must understand her in some way. For, she is not a concept or merely a sign, but a person who lives and will go on living. There is an urgency to this comprehension of Hedwig in her living materiality.

After singing fiercely the refrain of Angry Inch with Yizak for a few moments while the room is in chaos, Hedwig steps back from the microphone and surveys the room in a kind of stupor. The music goes on, but is muted, and seems to convey her attempt to numb herself from the havoc she has created. The tinkle of a piano, reminiscent of music that introduces an altered state of consciousness in other films, accompanies Hedwig as she jumps up and flies away into the memory of her lowest moment – the day the wall came down, the day that her sacrifice to freedom was rendered wholly unnecessary.

Wig in a Box

The song, Wig in a Box is done in the typical film musical fantasy set-up. It begins as a flashback to the moment when two events mark Hedwig's sacrifice of the intelligibility of her body unnecessary, and even foolish: she sits in her trailer in Junction City, Kansas watching in disbelief as her husband leaves her for a teenage boy and, at the same time, the Berlin Wall is being torn down on the television. Neither the marriage, nor the operation, nor her mother's bequest of her name were sufficient in giving Hedwig her identity. It is only when she is stripped of all of the stability she hoped to find in her new life in America that she finds

performance that is being considered. The psychoanalytic theorization of castration anxiety will come to the fore, however, in my discussion of male spectatorship in relation to the song Wig in a Box.

that she must create her Hedwig persona in order to exist socially. Wig in a Box is a song of self-empowerment in which we watch Hedwig try on and embrace the identity of American femininity through a pastiche of such concepts of female identity as 'Miss Midnight Check-out Queen', 'Miss Beehive 1963', 'Farrah Fawcett from TV' and 'This Punk Rock Star of Stage and Screen'. Furthermore, throughout the film, we watch her attempt to appropriate portions of her female rock idols: Chrissy Hynde, Tina Turner, Ricky Lee Jones, by way of the iconic wigs she chooses to wear. «It's all because of you» is repeated several times in the chorus, but it is not clear whether this is a reference to Luther, Hedwig's ex-husband who urged her to have the sex-change, or to the many women who make up the population of females that cite, (re)create, and police the domain of the feminine – a domain that can be difficult to pass into if one has not had years of practice and social support. A concatenation of multiplicitous hair-dos and make-up become metonymic tropes for Hedwig's commitment to finding the feminine-based persona through which she may once again face the world and attempt to fulfill her desire of finding romantic love and artistic expression.

This optimistic musical number about self-reinvention after tragedy relieves some of the tension from the previous Angry Inch. But several new tensions replace it. Hedwig has committed the ultimate crime in the eyes of the male subject, the willing submission to castration. The film must address this transgression in some manner. As Laura Mulvey theorizes, the intricacies of the relationship between the gendered spectator and the gendered actors on screen follow a particular pattern in classic narrative cinema: male spectators wish to identify with a male protagonist and, because of the threat of castration that the female actor poses, either sublimate their fear by desiring that the female character be exposed in her sin and punished, or made into a fetish object that disavows the castration (Mulvey 1975: 8-9). The character of Hedwig takes on all of these roles in order to capture the male gaze, producing a tension between the rule of representation of gender in classic narrative cinema (the dominate cinematic paradigm), which creates certain expectations in an audience accustomed to viewing film characters in this way, and the specific performance that attempts to appropriate all the rules at once. Let's look at each of these appropriations.

Although the audience meets Hedwig at the start of the film somewhere towards the end of the fabula – a time in which she has already been performing and living with her Hedwig persona for some time – the flashbacks establish her in her beginnings as Hansel, a boy with a dream of being an American rock musician. After the castration, guilt is assigned and punishment is exacted. Both of these fates are executed at the

prelude to the Wig in a Box number. As the news-reel footage of the Berlin Wall being knocked down plays on the television, the announcer remarks, «The Germans are a patient people, and good things come to those who wait». The juxtaposition of this line of dialogue upon the narrative displays Hedwig as guilty of a foolish impatience. This quality, in the logic of the announcer's comment, excludes her from identity with the German nation, as it introduces the justification for her bad luck – it was not bad luck at all, but a punishment for what she did: for not waiting with others for freedom, for taking her own liberties with the social and legal systems, and disobeying the authority of heteronormativity to boot. She is thus interpellated by the news-caster as guilty of betraying her nation, and not welcome back. Her punishment takes the form of her husband abandoning her in a trailer park alone in a new country, in a region that is intolerant to 'the other'.

The song itself, Wig in a Box, then allows the male unconscious yet another way to escape from castration anxiety – fetishistic scopophilia. By building the physical beauty of the object, Hedwig, her abjected body becomes transformed into something pleasurable. As she begins the attempt to rescue her image from the realm of the abject, she sings, «This is the best way that I've found, to be the best you've ever seen». Putting on make-up, attending to the style of her hair, Hedwig makes herself into a woman by demonstrating her ability to hold the male gaze, that is, her possession of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Beauty in the realm of the abject is certainly not allowed in the heteronormative system of gender performativity, but it is permitted here because she has adopted the performative aspects of an intelligible category of representation, femininity, and succeeds in carrying them out.

In following the rule, but following it in such a way that the differences within the rule hiding its existence as a rule are effaced, the character of Hedwig illuminates the performativity of the spectacle of gender in film. She absorbs our assumptions about the functions of males and females on the screen, and spits back ambivalences. There is no way of escaping this dialectical tension between the rule of representation of gender, and Hedwig's performance of gender in the film. And indeed, at the end of the film, this specific tension is revisited when Hedwig strips herself of all of the artifice of femininity appropriated in the Wig in a Box number, to reveal a nearly naked 'male' body. Once again, the male gaze is revealed in its ambivalence. If it shifts back into identification with the character merely because of the presence of her 'male' body, there it meets the tension between the specific narrative and cinematic gender norms. And if the identification does not shift back to Hedwig, the abjection of the 'male' body from the perspective of the male also produces a tension with the patriarchal norm. It is as if the gaze has nowhere to turn but inward

at the film's finish.

By showing the process of this self-(re)invention in Wig in a Box, the performativity of femininity is grounded in its dependence upon the iterability of citations. Hedwig cannot choose to be a woman in an altogether new way. In the way she represents herself, she has only the power to use images that have been repeated to the extent that they mean 'woman' to others. It is a tension between her abjected status (she has at this point been abjected from nation, family, sex, love, and class) and the use of subject tools that make the performance of the citations conspicuous as performative. It is not just that the audience has seen that hair-do before on a woman, or this feminine gesture, it is that performing these citations has the power to make someone whose body does not conform to the heteronormative definition of female into a female subject.

Hedwig does not consciously resist gender norms in Wig in a Box. In fact, she adheres to them steadfastly. The resistance that is evident in her performance is thus exposed as stemming from the derivative power of the traveling citation reiterated by the abject body; not an agential resistance on the part of Hedwig herself, as in the other two songs. What becomes a subversion of the heteronormative system is the intersubjective moment between her performances – which reveals gender / sex norms as contingent, plural, and mutable – and the audience, who are subjected to those norms as if they were essential, static and unidimensional. It is in this tension between the apparent authority of the universal rule, and the singular manifestation that undermines its authority that performativity is made conspicuous.

Conclusion

What my investigation of Hedwig and the Angry Inch shows is that a specific gender performance, in maintaining the tension between its specificity and the general sex and gender norms, manifests an effective challenge to those norms. Butler succeeds in laying the groundwork for a theory of resistance, but it is the concept of dialectics and the determinate negation that, combined with her theory, truly establishes the performative act of repetition as having significant political impact. By shedding light on their performative possibilities, I hope I have made clear the power of abject beings to create and maintain a tension with the discourse that expels them. Hegemonic gender norms, in this way, have a weakness. This weakness can be displayed and exploited through the performance that allows the subject to experience an irresolvable tension with the abject, making the performativity that conditions this relation conspicuous. Repetition of this conspicuousness through the reproductive capacity of the cinematic medium fractures those hegemonic

gender norms and creates new possibilities for future subversive citations and iterability.

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Appendix: Song Lyrics (All Songs written by Stephen Trask)

Angry Inch

My sex-change operation got botched
My guardian angel fell asleep on the watch
Now all I got is a Barbie Doll-crotch
I got an angry inch

Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch
Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch

I'm from the land where you still hear the cries
I had to get out, had to sever all ties
I changed my name and assumed a disguise
I got an angry inch

Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch
Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch
Six inches forward and five inches back
The train is coming and I'm tied to the track
I try to get up but I can't get no slack
I got a
Angry Inch Angry Inch

My mother made my tits out of clay
My boyfriend told me that he'd take me away
They dragged me to the doctor one day
I've got an angry inch

Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch
Six inches forward and five inches back
I got a
I got an angry inch

Long story short
When I woke up from the operation
I was bleeding down there
I was bleeding from the gash between my legs
My first day as a woman
and already it's that time of the month
But two days later
the hole closed up
The wound healed
and I was left with a one inch mound of flesh
where my penis used to be
where my vagina never was
A one inch mound of flesh with a scar running down it
like a sideways grimace
on an eyeless face
It was just a little bulge
It was an angry inch

Six inches forward and five inches back
The train is coming and I'm tied to the track
I try to get up but I can't get no slack
I got an
Angry Inch Angry Inch

Six inches forward and five inches back
stay under cover till the night turns to black
I got my inch and I'm set to attack
I got an Angry Inch Angry Inch

Wig In A Box

On nights like this
when the world's a bit amiss
and the lights go down
across the trailer park
I get down
I feel had
I feel on the verge of going mad
and then it's time to punch the clock

I put on some make-up
and turn up the tape deck
and pull the wig down on my head
suddenly I'm Miss Midwest
Midnight Checkout Queen
until I head home
and put myself to bed

I look back on where I'm from
look at the woman I've become
and the strangest things
seem suddenly routine
I look up from my Vermouth on the rocks
a gift-wrapped wig still in the box
of towering velveteen.

I put on some make-up
and some LaVern Baker
and pull the wig down from the shelf
Suddenly I'm Miss Beehive 1963
Until I wake up
And turn back to myself

Some girls they have natural ease
they wear it any way they please
with their French flip curls
and perfumed magazines
Wear it up
Let it down
This is the best way that I've found
to be the best you've ever seen

I put on some make-up
and turn up the eight-track
I'm pulling the wig down from the shelf
Suddenly I'm Miss Farrah Fawcett
from TV
until I wake up
and turn back to myself

Shag, bi-level, bob
Dorothy Hammil do,
Sausage curls, chicken wings
It's all because of you
With your blow dried, feather back,
Toni home wave, too
flip, fro, frizz, flop,
It's all because of you
It's all because of you
It's all because of you

I put on some make-up
turn up the eight-track

I'm pulling the wig down from the shelf
Suddenly I'm this punk rock star
of stage and screen
and I ain't never
I'm never turning back

Tear Me Down

Don't you know me Kansas City,
I'm the new Berlin wall
Try and tear me down.

I was born on the other side
of a town ripped in two
I made it over the great divide
now I'm coming for you

Enemies and adversaries
they try and tear me down
You want me, baby, I dare you
Try and tear me down

I rose from off of the doctor's slab
like Lazarus from the pit
Now everyone wants to take a stab
and decorate me
with blood graffiti and spit

Enemies and adversaries
they try and tear me down
You want me, baby, I dare you
Try and tear me down.

On August 13th, 1961,
a wall was erected
down the middle of the city of Berlin.
The world was divided by a cold war
and the Berlin Wall
was the most hated symbol of that divide
Reviled. Graffitied. Spit upon.
We thought the wall would stand forever,
and now that it's gone,
we don't know who we are anymore.
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Hedwig is like that wall,
standing before you in the divide
between East and West,
Slavery and Freedom,
Man and Woman,
Top and Bottom.
And you can try to tear her down,
but before you do,

you must remember one thing.

Hey.
You must know the difference
between a bridge and a wall
Without me right in the middle, babe
you would be nothing at all.

Enemies and adversaries
they try and tear me down
You want me, baby, I dare you
try and tear me down.

Enemies and adversaries
they try and tear me down
You want me, baby, I dare you
try and tear me down

From East Berlin to Junction City
Hello New York hello Missouri
What you try and tear me down
come on and tear come on and tear me down.

Biographical Note

Originally from San Francisco, CA, Papagena Robbins will receive a research master's degree in Cultural Analysis from the Universiteit van Amsterdam in 2006. Her main research interests include: social, political, cultural and philosophical theory focused on modes of resistance to and critique of entrenched power structures, and media theory, especially regarding avantgarde and non-fiction film.

Intersexuality in American Feminist Science Fiction
Tea Hvala

The science fiction genre has traditionally used the space / time travel metaphor in order to achieve cognitive estrangement of what is known as our every-day reality. Classic theories of literature viewed fictional societies as quasireal and mimetic: as analogies, extrapolations, reductions or, most often, parodic negations of the present social order. Both postmodernist and queer theory questioned the importance of ontological differences between factual reality and fiction. They argued that the reader must make a conscious effort in order to separate the knowledge gained in life and the knowledge gained in fictional journeys of the mind. Are the reader and writer who refuse to recognize this ontological difference schizophrenic or do they, to paraphrase a schizophrenic, simply know too much – know that everything is possible? Fiction estranges reality, dislocates our familiar world, and exposes normality as normative. It suggests a distancing from the present moment and the 'futures' yet to come, both their emancipating promises and their shortcomings. As such, it inevitably changes with the reader, changes her and his language – expands the scope of their imagination and their lives.

In the early sixties, Theodore Sturgeon claimed that ninety percent of American science fiction is crap. His judgment was fairly optimistic if we observe the heterosexism and misogyny present in the great majority of science fiction written before 1968 in which women and queers simply did not exist or were continually portrayed as the alien Other. Monique Wittig doubted that people who have grown up in exploitative societies can think of alternative worlds outside the exploitative paradigm. However, she put her faith in language and its ability to embrace realities of all orders in the same way as American feminist science fiction writers of the late sixties and seventies employed different narrative strategies and ideas which promised to unlock the handcuffs of normative heterosexuality imposed upon our imagination. They have played with language (Marge Piercy, Octavia E. Butler), exaggerated genre's conventions and deliberately misinterpreted them (Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin) and reversed traditionally prescribed gender roles (Alice Sheldon aka James Tiptree Jr.). Theodore Sturgeon and Le Guin have abolished sex, built androgynous and hermaphroditic societies and, so it seemed, significantly reduced the importance of sex, gender and sexual orientation for one's sense of identity. Samuel R. Delany created space for as many gender identities and sexual preferences as necessary to satisfy his postmodern extraterrestrials with much the same effect. In spite of their innovative approaches, several writers failed to intrigue their readers because they ignored what Herbert Marcuse called «the

reality principle»: the (un)disputable characteristics of humanity which have to be reflected in utopian societies if they are to be considered relevant and comparable to a reader's own perception of reality. This short essay takes a closer look at some of the before-mentioned discursive strategies in order to suggest their use outside fiction: the ineffective, because we can learn from their mistakes and the effective, because they offer ways to transgress gender and other dualisms' dominance.

Ursula K. Le Guin's widely praised novel The Left Hand of Darkness (1969) established an egalitarian society without gender and as a consequence, without sexism. The novel is constructed as an anthropologist's and politician's poetic report about his life among Gethenians, a society of asexual androgynies who mutually evolve their genitalia into either female or male once a month in a short period of lively sexual activity. Feminist theorists criticized the use of masculine pronouns to address the predominantly genderless society which, to the readers eye, appears to be exclusively male. Since the narrator is the only male person in Gethena, Le Guin's use of male pronouns is a precise comment on the social nature of any self-identifying practice: the narrator's gender identity is threatened because it is incomparable to his surroundings. His decision to see Gethenians as males saves him from questioning and perhaps even abandoning his binary thinking habit. The same problem occurs in Theodore Sturgeon's novel Venus Plus X (1960) where the narrator, also the only terrestrial male living in a society of hermaphrodites, apologetically concluded that even though pronouns in Ledom language are not gendered, neutral pronouns translated to 'him' «in English because, for some reason of his own, Charlie preferred it that way» (Sturgeon, 1985:74). The narrator in Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time (1976) is female and perceives her mind visitors from an egalitarian ecotopian future as androgynous because their society enables both men and women to be «humanized» into «loving and tender beings» (Piercy, 1976:195). Piercy's vision excludes biological explanations of androgyny and grounds it in social and linguistic practices: she avoids the generic male pronoun by replacing personal pronouns 'he' and 'she' with 'person' and pronouns 'his', 'him' and 'her' with '*per*'. This simple innovation effectively corrects the sexist bias of Le Guin's and Sturgeon's work.

In The Left Hand of Darkness, the notion of sexual impoverishment reinforces the mythological image of androgyny's angelic and asexual figure whereas the inhabitants of Venus Plus X are sexually permissive. Still, both novels accept an «erotic economy, based on difference that actually requires a gender regime in the first place, i.e., the creation and regulation of difference» in which «an erotics of difference is the basic means by which desire is made to happen on other people's bodies»

(Wilchins, 1997:161-62). The erotics of difference in both novels forbid sexual encounter between a heterosexual terrestrial man and his androgynous / hermaphroditic other, simply because the relationship is not heterosexual. Since both novels refuse to question their implicit homophobia and narrators' obvious sexual identity crisis, both Ursula K. Le Guin and Theodore Sturgeon have reproduced the heterosexual matrix in spite of their attempts at doing the opposite. Their example supports Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's warning that «the study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry» since «we can't know in advance how they will be different» (Sedgwick, 1990:27).

In the American science fiction community, entertaining and educative gender confusion began with the public life of James Tiptree, Jr. Tiptree's stories offer non-essentialist criticism of the classic feminist theme of the war between the sexes. His many role reversals in stories like Your Haploid Heart (1969), Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death (1973), The Screwfly Solution (1977) or Houston, Houston, Do You Read? (1976) do not attempt to stop the war but bring it to its only logical conclusion: the war between the sexes will cease only when either the male or the female population is wiped off the surface of the Earth. Alice Sheldon used the Tiptree pseudonym even after her 'true' sex was revealed and the news published by a curious reader without her permission in 1974. Sheldon's use of a male pseudonym revealed the gender-based expectations about supposed differences between female and male writing since her works published before 1974 were regularly praised for their 'inextricable maleness'. Most revealing was Ursula K. Le Guin's reaction. In 1978, she wrote:

> «What does it mean to say that 'Tiptree is Sheldon', or that 'James Tiptree, Jr., is a woman'? I am not sure at all, except that it's a fine example of the pitfalls built into the English verb to be. You turn it around and say, 'A woman is James Tiptree, Jr.', and you see you have said something quite different» (Le Guin in Wood, 1979:181).

It is the year 2112 and the narrator in Samuel R. Delany's Triton (1976) claims that his «explanation would have been nonsense two hundred years ago. [...] The episteme has changed so entirely, so completely, the words bear entirely different charges, even though the meanings are more or less what they have been» (Delany, 1990:333). Both androgyny and hermaphroditism carry dualism in their names and their historical burden disapproves interpretations which could challenge the institution of gender. The shift from ideals of 'the third sex' to intersexuality required the same epistemological change

necessary to shift from feminism to postfeminism and queer theory. It is no coincidence that androgyny, hermaphroditism and abolition of sex and gender prevailed in science fiction which respects aesthetics of realism whereas, intersexuality appears in prose which favors postmodernist narration. Joanna Russ and Samuel R. Delany, nowadays considered the avantgarde of postmodernist science fiction, used a variety of discourses – from scientific to poetic – to mock genre's rigid formal conventions and political stagnancy. Genre's strategy of double speech which faces knowledge of the fictional society with knowledge of the visitor in order to estrange and dislocate the reader's perspective has been replaced by a multitude of partial and contradictory narrative voices. The reader is denied the pleasure of identification with narrators and denied their guidance. Instead, Russ' and Delany's 'ambiguous heterotopias' offer co-operation: both entertaining and disturbing (meta)fictional comments on language, body, sexuality and corresponding identificatory practices. They abandoned genre's traditional preoccupation with ontology – the search for the essential nature of human species, and focused on epistemology – the perception of others and ourselves.

Joanna Russ embraced Le Guin's 'pitfalls of language' in The Female Man (1975) to show the socially interdependent construction of identities. In her novel, four intertwined societies shape four possible female identities: Joanna is an emancipated woman of our age who must become «a man, me, Joanna. I mean a female man, of course» (Russ, 1990:5) in order to be perceived as human in a sexist society; Jeannine is a dehumanized woman from a patriarchal dystopia, sacrificed on the altar of romantic love; Jael is a violent and obnoxious separatist Amazon at war with men, demonstrating that the will to dominate is not a feature reserved for men; Janet is the visitor from an all-female and technologically advanced utopian society called Whileaway. Following Monique Wittig's exemption of lesbians from the category of women, Janet's self-confidence and her lesbian non-monogamous sexuality suggest a possible way to redesign gender roles beyond the heterosexist divide. However, the most interesting aspect of The Female Man is the four women's dialectic relationship. In a fragmented and disorientating style, their voices intertwine to the point of merging but never do so since Russ insists on portraying the political subject of women in all its contradictory diversity. Gender estrangement in Russ's story The Mystery of the Young Gentleman (1982) is achieved through parodic appropriation of nineteenth century constructions of homosexuality and a series of gender masquerades. Similarly to The Female Man, the gentleman's gender identity is defined by others' expectations. Like Jeannine's femininity or Joanna's transformation into a female man, the gentleman's performance is

successful even though her/his sex is mysterious: he is perceived as male because his/her performance of gender is a simple citation of male social norms. A doctor tries to reveal her/his sex and questions him extensively but misreads all the narrator's explicit statements about his/her intersexuality simply because he is so trained into binary thinking that he can only think of one solution: the gentleman must be homosexual. The inability to imagine non-gendered subjects and the confusion they stir is best portrayed in the story's parodic conclusion: «What doom is stored up in Heaven for these hard-hearted men and women, diabolically disguised as men and women or vice versa and therefore invisible to our eyes, speaking the language of anyone in the room, which is dreadfully confusing because you can't tell what degenerate nation (or race) they may come from, and worst of all, pretending to be human beings? When in fact they ARE???» (Russ in Hollinger, 1990).

In Samuel R. Delany's Triton, a fixed notion of identity is beside the point since its inhabitants can change their sex and refixate their sexual preferences daily like they change their occupations and underwear. Triton's «forty or fifty basic sexes» (Delany, 1990:117) provide individuals with pleasure, community and respect – as long as they are able to decide which preference suits them. Intersexed subjects are no longer the alien and monstrous outlaws of normative heterosexuality since their gender has been commodified as yet another profitable aspect of each subject's «political inviolability» (330). The narrator is unable to say why he had his sex changed to female. «She knew that what she wanted was true and real by the act of wanting» (313), is the only argumentation she can provide. The inability to choose in a world of unlimited and available choices does not, as the reader might hope, result in rebellion against such capitalist appropriation but results in narrator's conceited despair. While the government is, ironically, killing thousands in order to keep individuality and subjectivity politically inviolable, the narrator is too preoccupied with her appearance and performance to even notice it. Delany's critique of postmodern relativity questions the often assumed inherently subversive nature of intersexuality. Triton has overcome sexism but failed to recognize its economic and political order as yet another tool for dehumanization.

The utopian aspect of queer theory must struggle for depolitization of gender and sexuality in order to move on from inevitably discriminatory identity-based politics to politics based on shared affinities and interests. However, as long as the current 'reality principles' perpetuate social injustice, intersexed people have no choice: the space, inhabited by all that is not heteronormative, must be politicized.

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