

Gender Outlaws: Gender Transgressive Images in Queer Performance and their relationship to The Grotesque.

Bruce Howard Bayley

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The title of my paper is derived from the book *Gender Outlaw* by Kate Bornstein, a transgendered male to female performer, director and writer working in the United States. I will be drawing on material from my clinical dramatherapy work with gender transgressive male homosexual clients and my current research into contemporary cabaret and street theatre performers and performance artists within the United Kingdom who present gender non-conformist images in what has come to be known variously as 'Queer Theatre', 'Freak Theatre' or 'Theatre of Anti-Gender'. I hope to present these images in relation to Queer Theory and The Grotesque and to suggest possible resonances with the image of the Trickster Figure.

My clinical dramatherapy work between 1991-1992 was with four young, male, homosexual prostitutes who presented as being divided between two, sometimes more, personas of differing genders at various times but without any loss of a fundamental identity. They were not manifesting the psychological states of dissociation or multiple personalities. Their self-representations contained indicators of both male and female genders alongside each other. These clients were expressing ambivalence towards continuous male or female gender behaviours and also towards transexuality (in the sense that this term means undertaking gender re-assignment surgery) which would take them towards a position of 'gender certainty'.

They:

- (a) adopted female personas with female names both in the sessions and in their life experiences while acknowledging themselves to be biological males.
- (b) they assigned both male and female names to male genitals and other body parts.
- (c) they identified with female characters in pictorial material, written material and enactments within the dramatherapy sessions while also identifying themselves with male characters who may be presented within the same specific material or identified with in other material in other sessions.
- (d) expressed ambivalence towards maleness, femaleness and transexuality.

- (e) the adopted clothing along the lines that suggested a split in gender stereotyping.
- (f) they played roles, within dramatherapy enactments, of females characters presenting themselves as males and vice versa.
- (g) they stated a preference for bisexual partners with whom the client would be identifying as being "feminine" but who would be aware that the client was a biological male presenting a female persona.
- (h) they would take on a 'feminine' role in sexual partnership while identifying positively with the potency and perceived 'largeness' of the penis.

In May 1995 the BBC broadcast a 'Q.E.D.' programme called 'Sex Acts' which featured a number of people who were born as either males or females but who, like my gender-transgressive dramatherapy clients, also wish to live neither as males nor as females but as a third gender, as it were, some of whom had undergone surgery on certain parts of their bodies not in order to assist them to gender certainty but to reflect their non-identification with the existing categories of gender. What these people are saying is that they wish to identify with a kind of "gender-play" with a greater degree of fluidity or flexibility than is available within the binary of the male-female gender system. To this extent they may be considered to be gender-transgressive. In Gender Outlaw (1995), Kate Bornstein who is a transgendered writer, performer and director identifies a position similar to what I have called 'gender-play' by distinguishing between 'gender ambiguity' and 'gender fluidity':

If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender-code then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate change. (1995, p52)

In the sense that these individuals and my clients are living in between genders or as a third gender, they embody qualities that Victor Turner has associated with 'liminal personae' the attributes of which are necessarily ambiguous, as 'these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space ... they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. (Turner, 1969)

The various models of psychology and psychotherapy contain, as part of their establishments, pathologizing strategies that perceive any gender or sexual identities that do not conform to the cultural norms of, what Judith Butler has so aptly called, 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Gender Trouble, 1990), as being developmental failures, sicknesses or intrinsic lacks. Andrew Samuels in offering a pluralist perspective in The Plural Psyche (1989) suggested that it is not helpful to see gender as an invariant but that we are as a race divided not only into men and women but those who are certain about gender and those who are not; that 'gender' itself engenders confusion which is made

worse when gender terms are used to describe 'inner qualities' that need to be spoken about without the need to be gender-ascribed. He wrote in 1989: the link between the psyche and body surely refers to the body as a whole: its moods, its movements, its prides and its shames ... the body is already a psychological body, an imaginal body - providing a whole range of experiences - sometimes crossover experiences, 'masculine' for women and 'feminine' for men (1989, p101).

Going on to question the entire premise that heterosexuality and its concomitant genderism is innate Samuels offered a vision of 'there being available to all individuals a variety of positions in relation to gender roles without recourse to androgyny' as June Singer does.' (1989, p105). Bornstein (1995) refers to gender ambiguity as the refusal to conform to a prescribed gender code and gender fluidity the refusal to remain any one gender or another. It contains the non-recognition of the rules and boundaries of gender and the ability to 'freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of change'(1995, p52). It is this non-recognition and challenging of the boundaries of gender which, in part at least, lies at the foundation of Queer Theory and which informs the embodiments and images contained within Queer Performance.

Use of the word 'queer' does not signify biological sex, anatomical structure, or specific sexual preference. Moe Meyer writes that the term 'Queer: indicates an ontological challenge to the dominant labelling philosophies especially the medicalization of the subject implied by the word 'homosexual', as well as a challenge to discrete gender categories embedded in the divided phrase 'gay and lesbian' ... (1994, p1)

Queer emerged as a term of inclusion not only as a reappropriation of a term that was once used as part of derogatory name-calling but also as a challenge to the discrete gender categories contained in the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' and as an ontological challenge to the perceived pathologizing strategies within existing models of psychology and psychotherapy. Michael Wilson, in his lecture at the Catalyst Arts Centre in Belfast entitled Rehearsals towards any future performance that would be-Queer(1994) cites that among the various meanings of the word 'queer' is its meaning as the transitive verb 'to queer', signifying 'to spoil' or 'to put out of order'. The answer to the question What is being put out of order in this case? is that the notion of 'Queer ' spoils or seeks to put out of order the system whereby identity is determined and shaped by the dominant concepts of sexual orientation. Queer Theory, then, contains the deconstruction of existing labels of personal sexual behaviour by which the dominant power of the heterosexual hegemony and bourgeois ideology is maintained.

Queer Performance inherits from Queer Theory an agenda that is seen as being both revolutionary and proletarian, in that it takes an oppositional stance to what is seen as compulsory heterosexuality and the dominant gender class-system. Queer Performance is gender- transgressive when it seeks to undermine the notion that social identity must necessarily be linked to the sexual categorical system. Gender-transgressive Queer Performers embody this transgressive and revolutionary agenda by using various performance strategies including cross-dressing, cross-gender casting and the

juxtaposition of male and female gender cues, styles and images in order to put this agenda into performance.

Between 1996 and 1998 I attended over 100 performances in a number of theatres, cabaret venues, and street performances whose productions exemplified gender-transgressive images and material. I also conducted interviews with 12 of these performers. My focus was on those performers who, like my dramatherapy clients did, utilize aspects of both male and female gender role indicators alongside each other and who can be perceived as speaking from a position which is not a fully unified, gendered one, whose performances intentionally set out to disrupt gender certainty and the duality of the male-female gender system. I did not select those performances which involve simple cross-dressing (where a performer of one gender is dressed as the opposite gender as exemplified by traditional male or female impersonation). I based this decision on the grounds that such straight substitutions of one gender for another is still playing within the parameters of the existing gender system. I also chose performers whose productions stem, to a large degree, from their own existential circumstances, who identify with some borderline or outlaw community or non-community. In this respect, their work is immediately distinguishable from that of any director, performer or writer who may also produce performances which involve cross-dressing or cross-gendered casting but whose existential situation can be perceived as remaining within the parameters of the dominant categorical gender system. In such a case, it would be arguable that the work is not necessarily an embodiment of gender transgression so much as containing a series of traditional theatrical conventions for some other agenda than that with which Queer Performance is concerned.

Theatre Performances.

In Bornstein's play *Hidden: A Gender* (1989), which examines the suicide of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth century hermaphrodite, she presents issues of gender-play by a variety of means - via transgendered casting, fluidity of structure and style, the blending of several genres into one piece and shifts in performer/spectator relationships. Scenes shift from a Marx Brothers' style parody to freak-show barker type monologues, from demonstrations of re-assignment surgery to a dreamlike surreal dance sequence to a television game show *What's my Gender?*. Noreen Barnes has said of Bornstein's work that together with other practitioners in the field she has created a distinct style of fluid form and content in a move 'towards a queer theatre', which demands in turn a fresh critical reception for such work. (p315)

In his one man show *It Took More Than One Man*, Ivan Cartwright (Plate I) draws strongly on personal anecdote, old Hollywood movies and contemporary television advertising to present his autobiographical performance about growing up queer in the North of England. Cartwright's narrative follows his development as a young gay man who starts to have a hormonal treatment with the intention of having a gender reassignment operation. Having grown breasts and lived as a pre-operative transgendered woman, Mary Anne, he then decides that a constructed femaleness is no more suitable a gender for him than his

biological maleness had been. After having his hormonal treatment reversed, he ends the show with a declaration of his own individual identity that is the kind of man he is - 'the Queen' that he is. The allusion to more than one man plays not only on Cartwright's maleness before and after the hormonal treatment but also the duplicity involved in living the life of a professional drag queen. He says, 'Well, I've embroidered the garment but I haven't changed the outfit' referring to his identification with being a Queen - a status for which gender reassignment surgery is considered to be irrelevant as that process leads to gender certainty which is contained within the categorical gender system. He, also, unlike a number of other male to female transgendered people acknowledges, within the play, the constructed nature of his so-called femaleness and the impossibility of his ever being able to be a woman merely by having hormonal treatment and surgery. Cartwright's denouement is not returning to the position of being a man but finding and claiming one as a Queen - an identity that is not available within the gender system but which is gender-transgressive and queer.

'Post-modern Queer experience - confusin', ain't it, confusin', ain't it ?' is the verse line of a song by The Divine Feud (Cathy Peace and Chris Green, a lesbian and a gay male performer) in their show of the same name. They refer to themselves as Queer performers because they see the essence of the term 'Queer' encompasses a search for reinventing ways of relating between gay men, lesbians, transgendered people etc. that is different from relating to the stereotypes of these groups. The show is a cabaret presentation of the entire history of human society, fronted by two characters in identical traditional show-girl outfits (boas, feathers, and all) both of whom are called 'Julie'. In the course of their hour long show, the two Julies present songs, monologues, audience participation game shows, scripted skits and various impersonations in a variety of styles taken from music hall, melodrama, burlesque, traditional drag, end-of-the pier stand-up comedy routines, pantomime, clowning and acrobatics. They play various characters within these scenes and while there is material to do with gender play in the textual content of the pieces presented there is no 'cross-gendering' between the two performers. They may look like twin sisters in their show-girl outfits but Cathy Peace's 'Julie' is a female and Chris Green's character is a man called Julie and not a female character. They introduce themselves to their audiences as 'post-modern purveyors of pleasure, divas of deviant delight and the only male and female drag act in town'.

For Cathy Peace, drag is to some extent genderless.

Drag has very strong roots in the performance of blown-up, grotesque, larger than life portrayals that come from clowning, burlesque and freak shows. It's all about dressing up, the heightened make-up, the false eyelashes and all that goes with that kind of blown-up portrayal of stereotype, glam, show-girlie female images. I'm not being an actress when I'm doing that. I'm being more like a grotesque drag performer. (Interview with BB 1996) Here drag is not being merely equated with cross-dressing. It is being treated as a performance form in its own right - one that uses blown-up caricatures and one that, as Esther Newton put it in *Mother Camp: Female Impersonation in America*, 'enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed'.

A non-participatory transcendence of gender can be evidenced in the performances of The Divine David which embody the total refusal of gender altogether. The Divine David who describes himself as an avant garde performance artist has performed in several Queer cabaret venues in London over the last two years. His performances incorporate songs, monologues, mime, dance and painting. In one point in his performance he says:

There's no such thing as gender. There's no such thing as men and women. All there is, is being. You're born. You are. You die. You've been. That's all there is. The categories don't exist. They are only words and words are only a polite way of grunting, we've transcended that. We no longer need language.

(The Divine David in performance. London 1996)

In saying "We no longer need language", I suggest that The Divine David is rejecting the words and language in which gender is actually described - "assigned and arrayed" to use Turner's phrase - and, therefore, the gender categories themselves.

Towards the end of one of his performances The Divine David, dressed in a lime green satin two-piece suit with Gothic make-up on his face, black lip-stick, enormous paste ear-rings, glittering costume jewellery, fish-net tights and bright red stiletto-heeled shoes strides commandingly up and down the stage smoking a cigarette in a long-stemmed cigarette holder, drinking a drink. He asks the audience if anyone has any drugs with them. Someone leaps forward and hands him a 'joint'. He then laughs, throws his head back and announces:

Ladies unt Gentlemen! Thank you all for having shared this evening with us at the Royal Vauxhall Conference Centre. We ARE the FUTURE ! If there is anyone left amongst you in this auditorium tonight who still believes that we ARE anything at all to do with the fact that we may have external genital organs or internal genital organs or that the fact we may or may not have external or internal genital organs has ANYTHING AT ALL to do with why we are here and with who we REALLY ARE then I suggest you go home, get yourself a BRAIN, a GUN and SHOOT yourself! It will be the kindest thing you can do! Isn't that marvellous ? (Loud whistles, applause from the audience). Just remember as you leave tonight and go home to your sad little bedsits - I know that's what I'm going to do - that we are ALL OF US more than a collection of cells and organs and that WHATEVER WE ARE WE ARE ALL OF US BEAUTIFUL and that one day (he chuckles at this point)...we will DIE! Isn't that marvellous? (Further yells of appreciation and applause)

The Divine David's performance persona and his identification with anarchical values are not easily contained within existing social prescriptions and conditions, even those of the ordered alternative gay and lesbian cultures. Everything is 'up for grabs', as it were, including language. In a sense, also, his performances embody what Mary Douglas (1966) referred to as 'falling between classificatory boundaries' and, therefore, are regarded as 'polluting' and 'dangerous' (Douglas 1966). The Divine David can be considered to be truly 'Queer'.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

This rejection and sense of transcending the gender categories is also evidenced in the work of The Order of Perpetual Indulgence which emerged in the seventies in Iowa, USA and has, since, established itself globally. The Order's Manifesto states:

The Promulgation of Universal Joy is a mission that the Order tries to carry out personally and collectively as an antidote to the oppressive effects of gender roles and behaviour forced upon women and men in our society.... The most direct means by which the Order expresses this public ministry is by the wearing of the Habit and the perpetration of their presence wherever and whenever possible. Perpetual Indulgence is both a name and a way of life. The christian church has granted and still grants indulgences to its members, freeing them from the temporal punishment of sin. The Order of Perpetual Indulgence, in a similar way, claims, for all people, a perpetual indulgence from self-punishment, Stigmatic Guilt and despair. (The OPI Manifesto. 1998)

The performances of the Sisters of The Order of Perpetual Indulgence vary from individuals going out on the streets in their habits when they are said to be 'manifesting in their nunsonas'. to political demonstrations, Gay and Lesbian parades, street parties and ceremonies such as the Canonizations of Saints of the Order and Queer Joining Ceremonies. The Sisters of the Order within the United Kingdom tend to wear Vatican 2 habits but enhance them with various carnivalesque accessories (Plate II). Referring to the established church as the Vulgar Church, the performed ceremonies are conducted largely in Polari (gay slang) by celebrant male nuns/sisters whose 'nunsona' names are based on sexual word-play such as Mother Ophelia Balls, Sister Virgin on the Ridiculous, Sister Madonna of the Edible Orifice, Sister Mystic Smeg of the Fortune-Telling Penis and Crystal Balls and Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look. The following is the text of a Ceremony of Vestition (a ceremony where a member of the public enters the Order as a novice):

Sister Celebrant:

I am today's Sister Celebrant from the Convent of the Swishing Curtain and my name is Sister Anorak of the Cheap Day Return. I'd like to welcome you all to this bona bijou ceremony, a voodoo, Anglican vaudeville mass conducted in high Polari. Bona to varda your dolly old eke! (Rough translation: Good to see you!)

Congregation: *To bona you varda your eke dolly old.*

Sister Celebrant:

*I call upon this postulant, wishing to test his vocation to come forward in his emotional nakedness and unashamedness. He wishes to test his vocation in the world-wide Order of the Sisters Of Perpetual Indulgence and is about to enter the novitiate.....
..... We take him unnamed and unclothed and we give him a name and clothe him. Bona to varda you dolly old eke!*

Congregation: *To bona you varda your eke dolly old.*

The ceremony continues with the Testing, the Naming and proceeds to the Clothing. The Sister Celebrant recites the following text as the garments are handed to the postulant:

Sister Celebrant:
(The Tunic)

*Take this tunic, ironed and black
May it strengthen demeanour, turn guilt back.
It will be your strength for years to come
And hide the pimples on your bum.*

*Take this cincture and tie it tight.
May it be your comfort day and night.
Tie the knot to prove the joy
That you will bring to every girl and boy.
Tie the knot for the manifestation
You will publicly make to each congregation.*

*This is your scapula, straight, not fanned.
Be humble with it and let it hide your hands!
Keep it ironed and flowing free.
Let it show the world your ecstasy!*

It continues with The Wimple, The Guimpe and the Bandeau ending with the Veil and the Boots:

Sister Celebrant:
(The Veil)

*At last your veil, light and flowing.
It signifies your youth and your growing.
Let it flow through the world like escaping gasses
As you grant Perpetual Indulgence to the masses.*

(The Boots)

*Keep your shoes shiny and clean.
Use plenty of polish, don't be mean.
Let them reflect a nun who seems well built
As you expiate Stigmatic Guilt*

(Text of Vestition Ceremony of the OPI)

These are not necessarily private ceremonies. The 'Gathered Faithful' includes all and anyone who may be assembled at the ceremony, wherever it may happen to take place. The gender-play here is contained in the simultaneous usage of the terms 'sister' and 'nun' and the pronouns 'he', 'him' and 'his'. These performances contain similar inversions to what Weimann, writing on medieval folk-plays and social customs, called 'topsy-turvydom in ceremony and performance' (Weimann, 1978). Here the established church's concepts of goodness and naturalness - heterosexuality and sexual continence - are replaced by Queer sex and sexual freedom, the established church's virtue of remorse for sins, penitence and pleas for indulgence (forgiveness) are seen as the result of the sense of guilt which is itself to be expiated. Robert O'Neill Crossman, known variously as Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look or Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye who was until his death in 1997 the Mother Inferior of the Canterbury House made a deliberate identification of his work for the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence with medieval foolery:

ML: A transvestite or drag queen is going out in drag. I'm putting my habit on because I am a nun. I'm not a pretend nun. I am a nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest.

BB: I suppose one might ask the question why nuns? Why Mother and not Father or Brother?

ML: Because of the thing about masculine and feminine and the undermining of it all. All that gender stuff is one of the prime sources of Stigmatic Guilt which we are pledged to give Perpetual Indulgence from. It's Holy Theatre, if you like. Holy Fools! Like the Medieval Feast of Fools. Because that also had serious political points to make.

(Interview, 1996)

Street and Carnival Images.

It is arguable as to whether Gay and Lesbian Pride Marches can be considered to be 'carnival' in the sense that 'carnival' has a proleterian, for-all-of-the-people, agenda that may be implicitly political but is not associated with celebrating the political freedom of any specific sections of the community. However, the proleterian and revolutionary agenda presented by Queer theorists and the expansive nature of the Gay and Lesbian Parades in Europe and the Gay Mardi Gras celebrations in the United States and Sydney that progressively includes anyone who wishes to celebrate a sense of solidarity against what is seen as a pre-dominantly heterosexual system and culture does bring this category of event very close to the spirit of carnival. As such it is one of the great occasions for the display of gender-transgressive images. Here, the performances are spontaneous and anarchic, the nature of carnival undermines the distinction between observer and performer. Carnival is pluralistic, and anti-structural, abounding in a multiplicity of images of the body presenting sexual, gustatory and excessive spectacle harking back to the Medieval Feast of Fools - exemplified for us by the bearded man in the period dress (Plate III) and his simple gender-transgressive presentation of male and female indicators

alongside each other. The Parades also allow for images celebrating exaggerations of bodily form, such as the two fat drag-queens (Plate IV). The anarchic spirit of the parades also allow scope for somewhat darker more intense images of paganism - the horned masked man in the black cloak (Plate V) and of the celebration of the pleasure of pain - exemplified by the enactment on a float of women representing aspects of sado-masochistic play (Plate VI).

The Grotesque.

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser considered the term 'grotesque' as a 'structure' whose nature could be read as 'the estranged world'(Kayser, 1963, trans. Weisstein). Kayser gives a detailed developmental history of the word and offers that it evolved into a 'significant' word, 'an aesthetic category referring to certain creative attitudes (dreamlike, for instance), contents and structures, as well as to effects upon the beholder (Kayser 1963, p179). Christoph Wieland writing on the art of caricature in the eighteenth century offered that the essential nature of 'grotesque' was a detachment from reality. Kayser cites three types of caricatures classified by Wieland in *Unterredungen mit dem Pfarrer von ***** (1775), one of which included purely fantastic caricatures, or grotesques in the proper sense, where the painter...gives rein to an unchecked fancy....with the sole intention of provoking laughter, disgust and surprise about the daring of his monstrous creations by the unnatural and absurd products of his imagination. (in Kayser,1963 p30)

Kayser goes on to consider the word 'grotesque' to apply to (a) the creative process of the art product, (b) the work of art in itself and (c) the reception of the work: the process of creating images that contain the 'unreal' elements, the work of art that embodies elements associated with 'estrangement' and the reception of the product by spectators/audience who receive it as 'disgusting', 'absurd', 'distorted', 'comic', 'fantastic' etc. He maintains that 'among' (the grotesques) 'belong all "monsters"' and that the 'grotesque is experienced only in the act of reception' (Kayser, *ibid.*, p181). In receiving these works of art, Kayser says, we are 'strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world' (Kayser, *ibid*, p185).

In *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo begins by evoking the association of the grotesque with the catacomb and the cave - the grotto-esque - 'low, hidden, earthly, dark and visceral'. (Russo p1). Linking the 'grotesque' with the feminine and that which is seen as subversive to the norm-setting patriarchy, she goes on to distinguish between two forms the grotesque - the Comic and the Uncanny, associating the former with Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnival-grotesque in *Rabelais and His World*, and the latter with Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 'the horror genre and with Freud's essay "On the Uncanny"'(Russo, 1995, p7). Russo locates the comic grotesque in the political domain, offering that it is employed largely in relation to social conflict - 'it is a virile category associated with the civic world of the public' (Russo, *ibid.* p8). The grotesque as Uncanny, Russo suggests, is located in a more 'interiorized space' of internalized fantasy - 'most

strongly related to the psychic register' (Russo, *ibid.* p9). Russo's distinction between the materially embodied and the psychological aspects of the grotesque is, itself based on the acknowledgement of the division between interior and exterior worlds, the realm of the public and the private, the political and the personal.

Bakhtin's work on carnival as depicted in the texts of Rabelais is organized around the concept of 'grotesque realism' with an emphasis on the earthy and the grotesque as contained within the notion of the 'grotesque body'. It is associated with the 'lower bodily stratum', with roundness and largeness with lavatorial and evacuatory processes, degradation, filth, death and also with the dark containing womb, birth and rebirth. It has been excluded from the canons of classical aesthetics as it is the antithesis of the 'classical body' which is seen as transcendent, monumental, static, closed, symmetrical, and elegant. The grotesque body is irregular, secreting, multiple and changing and is 'blended with the world, with animals, with objects'. On another level he conceives of the 'grotesque body' as a social body:

The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed.
(Bakhtin p19)

On this level, the 'classical body' is identified with the 'high'official culture of the Renaissance with its traditional hierarchical power structures and the language of officialdom, the 'grotesque body' is identified with the proletariat, social transformation, folk culture - which included ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace, parodies both oral and written and the language of the marketplace - which included oaths, curses, lavatorial humour and what Bakhtin calls 'various genres of billingsgate'.

I would now like to return to look at the performers from this perspective of the 'grotesque'. Bornstein locates her play *Hidden: A Gender* in three playing areas one of which is the space for the character Doc Grinder, who is the host/barker described in the stage directions as part twentieth century television talk show host and part nineteenth century medicine side-show barker. It is never clear whether Doc is a man or a woman, and this ambiguity is never acknowledged by Doc him/herself (Bornstein *ibid.* 1998). The travelling medicine show was essentially a 'freak' show where 'monsters' and people with various bodily distortions were exhibited as entertainment. By locating the play, which focuses largely on the experiences of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth century 'hermaphrodite, within such a space and by utilizing the strategy of the medicine show barker, Bornstein deliberately associates the issues of gender-fluidity and gender-transgressiveness with the world of the 'grotesque', the 'monster'. The essential vision of Bornstein's play lies, I believe, in the gender-transgressive theme where the two 'transsexual' characters, Herman and Herculine are seen to be really fulfilled while they are both gender ambiguous and portrayed as 'One' and 'Another' in true, blissful states of trans-sexual change. At the point where they achieve gender certainty neither can recall or relive that blissful state again. It may be argued that Bornstein's strategies were applied

because she was writing about a nineteenth century 'grotesque'. However, Bornstein calls her theatre 'Freak Theater'. I offer that by doing so and by utilizing these strategies, Bornstein was deliberately associating gender-transgressive Queer performance with the Grotesque.

In the performances of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, the grotesque parody of the ceremonies of the established church is clear. Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look was Sister Celebrant at a Joining Ceremony of two male lovers in the streets of Covent Garden in 1995. The invocation to the Gathered Faithful (general public and guests at the ceremony) was called, in a manner very much like a traditional Town Crier to the ringing of many bells:

Be it known to all the Gathered Faithful here present, Mother Molesta, Sisters, Acolytes, Friends for the day, Slaves, Catamites and all terrifically interested parties that the Order of Perpetual Indulgence is about to conduct it's soon-to-be-famous JOINING CEREMONY!... We are a world-wide sadomystic cult and self-catering organization, except when we're at the bar which is when our vow of poverty is most useful!... The Sisters are happy to assist these two men to publicly declare their delight in charver (sex), the shocking shudder of coincidental spattering and the ultimate and long- anticipated Victory to Cum.(Public Joining Ceremony of EH and FD, October 1995)

Here the Catholic Church's anathema becomes the agent of joy, light and salvation. These performances also share something of the nature of the comically grotesque. The language of the text is the bawdy language of burlesque and of the pantomime. The call reads very like the Rabelais' prologue to Gargantua:

Most noble boozers, and you my esteemed and poxy friends... now what do you think is the purpose of this preamble, of this preliminary flourish ? It is that you, my good disciples and other leisured fools, in reading the pleasant titles of certain books of our invention such as Gargantua, Pantagruel, Toss-pint, On the Dignity of Codpieces, Of Peas and Bacon, cum cum commento etc..may not too easily conclude that they treat of nothing but mockery ...

The novitiate's Vestition Ceremony and the Profession ceremony (which a novitiate takes when he enters the Order as a fully professed Nun) are self-acclaimed 'bona, bijou' ceremonies, 'vaudeville Anglican mass(es)', 'voodoo(s)' that incorporate elements of the 'grotesque' as are the sexual connotations of the uses of the various items of clothing - the tunic hiding the 'pimples' on the bum (sores); the 'joys that you will bring to every girl and boy'; the scapula hiding the hands, showing the world 'your ecstasy'; the veil flowing like 'escaping gasses' (farts); and the exhortation to use 'plenty of polish' on the boots (spit and polish, lubricant, grease); the allusion to the sado-mystic (sado-masochistic) cult and the invitation to delight in the shocking shudder of coincidental spattering and the ultimate and long-anticipated Victory to Cum. All these together make it very tempting to

associate the Order of Perpetual Indulgence with Rabelais' Order of Monks and Nuns of Thelema where 'in their rules there was only one clause Do What You Will'

The gender-transgressive Queer performers may all be seen as 'anomalies', as 'monsters' and as 'anathema'. They embody an oppositional and 'spoiling' stance in relation to the gender orthodoxy and point to the gender representations of that orthodoxy as myths and fictions but they also partake of something of the nature of The Trickster Figure found in the Winnebago Indian mythology - the comic, chaotic, ambivalent, sabotaging spirit of anarchy from whom, Paul Radin suggests, all such traits are perpetuated by clowns, jesters and fools.

The Winnebago Trickster Cycle, as presented by Radin consists of 49 episodes in which the capricious sub-human/super-human Trickster plays innumerable tricks on humans and animals. Trickster possesses no well-defined or fixed form. He is essentially inchoate of undetermined features and continually changing properties. He can imprison a hawk in his rectum and yet, on another occasion, enter the throat of a fish. He endows various parts of his body with independent existence. His body is not a unity - his intestines are wrapped around his body, his penis is carried in a box on his back with his scrotum on top of it. It is a detachable penis and, in one episode is sent across a lake to have intercourse with a chief's daughter. His anus is also removable and changeable in size and entrusted with special tasks such as keeping guard over his food by emitting strong gasses should the foxes attempt to steal his food while he sleeps. His gender is variable. He uses his penis to make plants grow but changes into a woman and bears children. He is grotesque and scurrilous, apparently aimless and directionless - unconscious of the reason why Earthmaker (God) has created him.

Radin's commentary focuses on the emerging consciousness of Trickster from an undifferentiated and instinctual stage through an awakening consciousness where he becomes aware of his identity and in one of the final episodes recollects the purpose for which he has been sent to Earth - to remove all obstacles and destroy all those things that would oppress people. He becomes a culture hero. Here we have changeability and ambivalence, the sabotaging and spoiling of that which is ordered, together with the theme of freeing the people from that which is restrictive and hurtful to them (Trickster's purpose). These motifs are also found at the base of Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' and in the gender-transgressive stance embodied by these performers.

The changeability and ambiguity that inheres in the work of these performers makes these works performances of liminality. In *Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality (?)*, Turner has said

Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play's the thing.

These performances embody at various times states of fluidity between genders and of non-participatory transcendence of gender itself. In these terms they are beyond gender

categorization (although aspects of gender role, behavior and images may be utilized by them at various times in order to manifest this fluidity and non-participatory transcendence) and, to this extent they could be considered ambiguous and, therefore, liminal. This embodied fluidity between genders has been evidenced in my citations of the work of Kate Bornstein and can be seen in Ivan Cartwright's journey from maleness through his gender-change procedure and his identity as Mary Anne back to a different kind of maleness. The non-participatory transcendence of gender can be evidenced in the performances of The Divine David embody the total refusal of gender altogether. The nun who is in 'habitual manifestation' is, in a sense, performing as an actor would perform a role, but is also considered to undergo a form of 'ego loss' in that his/her 'secular identity' merges with or is subordinated to her/his 'nunsona'. The process is more than that of a performer taking on a character/role in a play. An actor playing Macbeth or Charles Ludlam 'becoming' Camille may identify with Macbeth or Camille for the duration of the performance. There is not necessarily any acknowledged or identified merging of the actor's existential circumstances with those of the character s/he may be playing (although there might be). Their personal histories and narratives tend to remain separate histories and narratives. In gender-transgressive Queer performance, the performers can be seen as offering their bodies publicly in performance as embodiments of the performers' personal questioning, rejecting or queering of gender identity as stable, body-bound state. They may also be seen as embodying in their performances political and artistic ideas as well as strategies regarding performance itself.

Ivan Cartwright in his role in *It Took More Than One Man* is not only expressing the idea of gender fluidity over a period of time, moving from maleness to constructed femaleness and then to the gender-transgressive position of being a 'Queen', he is also representing himself as he really is. When Robert O'Neill Crossman says,

a tranny is going out in drag. I'm just putting my habit on because I AM A NUN. I'm not a pretend nun. I am a nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest.

He is not only expressing the ideology and strategies of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence and the idea that such performances are a way of 'losing ego', he is also representing himself through his 'nunsona' and his performances. Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye remains, after all, a male nun. The Divine David's performed diatribes against categories of gender would resonate very differently with his audiences if, rather than appearing in his lime green satin two-piece suit with Gothic make-up on his face, black lip-stick, enormous paste ear-rings, glittering costume jewellery, fish-net tights and bright red stiletto-heeled shoes, smoking a cigarette in a long-stemmed cigarette holder, he appeared in a three-piece businessman's suit or cross-dressed in the manner of a female impersonator. These performers can be said to be using their male-encoded physical bodies publicly in performance in order to embody the idea that gender identity should not be body-bound. By offering themselves publicly as embodiments in this way they become public expressions of liminality. These gender-transgressive Queer performers are not impersonating women nor are they representing a stable androgyny as

an integration of maleness and femaleness. They are employing gender-play in order to embody the rejection of the notion that maleness and femaleness are contained within the bounds of the body. It is in this area that these performers display their most publicly liminal dramatic bodies. The changes and ambiguities of identity that they embody in their performances can be seen as dramatizations or enactments of shape-shifting in its application to gender.

In his commentary on the Trickster Figure Jung, associated it with the alchemical figure of Mercurius and his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature - half-animal/half-divine - his exposure to all kinds of torture and his approximation to the status of a saviour. He considered the connections between the traits contained within the Trickster Figure and medieval festivals such as the Feast of the Circumcision in Paris (1198) where 'so many abominations and shameful deeds were committed that the sacred place was desecrated with 'smutty jokes and the shedding of blood' and the Feast of Fools with its inversions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy - the election of the Fools' Pope amidst masqueraders with grotesque faces, men dressed as women, all singing indecent songs in the choir. If the culture of the carnival-grotesque perpetuates customs that demonstrate the role of the trickster then it would follow that gender-transgressive Queer performance which partakes of the nature of the grotesque also stirs ancient memories within us of 'ancient saturnalia' as Jung put it.

For Jung, too, the Trickster Figure contained the traits of split or double personalities that are not just random but have complementary relationships to the ego-personality. Trickster, seen as a collective personification of character traits possessed by the Ego, is designated to be 'the collective shadow' from which our personal 'shadows' have, partially, descended. The myth has a therapeutic effect in that it helps keep the 'shadow' figure conscious and capable of scrutiny. Vestiges of Trickster have survived through the ages, with modifications, in carnivals, revels, sacred and magical rites, heretical practices, clowns, buffoons, fools, the grotesque, the comic, the profane and the uncanny. I offer that they also survive in the embodiments of individuals who reject the categorical gender system and in the art of gender-transgressive Queer performers.

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