

' ... a stunning achievement ... '

Sally Banes, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*



laurence senelick

the
**changing
room**

sex, drag and theatre

The Changing Room

Cross-dressing is an important theatrical technique. It creates a new reality, provides alternatives, unleashes the imagination and enables actors to provoke otherwise repressed responses in audiences. *The Changing Room* examines:

- the origins of the dame comedian, the principal boy, the glamour drag artiste and the male impersonator
- artists such as David Bowie, Boy George, Charles Ludlam, Dame Edna Everage, Lily Savage, Candy Darling, Julian Clary, and The New York Dolls
- the gender-bending elements of Greek and early Christian religion
- the homosexual appeal of the boy actor on the traditional stage of China, Japan and England
- tribal rituals and shamanic practices in Africa, Australia, the Balkans, Korea and Tibet.

Lavishly illustrated with unusual and rare pictures, this is the first ever cross-cultural study of theatrical transvestism. It is a must for anyone interested in cross-dressing, theatre, and gender.

Laurence Senelick is Fletcher Professor of Drama at Tufts University. He is the recipient of awards from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. His many publications include *Lovesick* (Routledge 1999), *The Chekhov Theatre* (1997), *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (1992) and *The Age and Stage of George L. Fox 1820–1877* (reprinted 1999).

GENDER IN PERFORMANCE

General editors: Susan Bassnett and Tracy C.Davis

The *Gender in Performance* series reflects the dynamic and innovative work by feminists across the disciplines. Exploring both historical and contemporary theatre the series seeks to understand performance both as a cultural and a political phenomenon.

Also available:

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEATRES

To each her own

Lizbeth Goodman

ACTRESSES AS WORKING WOMEN

Their social identity in Victorian culture

Tracy C.Davis

AS SHE LIKES IT

Shakespeare's unruly women

Penny Gay

FEMINIST THEATERS IN THE U.S.A.

Staging women's experience

Charlotte Canning

GETTING INTO THE ACT

Women playwrights in London 1776–1829

Eileen Donkin

WOMEN IN RUSSIAN THEATRE

The actress in the silver age

Catherine A.Schuler

THE CHANGING ROOM

Sex, drag and theatre

Laurence Senelick

The Changing Room

Sex, drag and theatre

Laurence Senelick



London and New York

First published 2000
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to
www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

© 2000 Laurence Senelick

The right of Laurence Senelick to be identified as the Author of this Work
has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced
or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means,
now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording,
or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission
in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Senelick, Laurence.

The changing room: varieties of theatrical cross-dressing/Laurence Senelick.
p. cm.—(Gender in performance)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Impersonation—History. 2. Female impersonators. 3. Male impersonators. 4. Gender
identity. I. Title. II. Series.

PN2071.I47 S46 2000

791'.086'6—dc21 99-054089

ISBN 0-203-41107-2 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-71931-X (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-10078-X (hbk)

ISBN 0-415-15986-5 (pbk)

This book is dedicated to Elke Mackenzie, whose transformation taught many who enjoyed transvestism on stage to appreciate transsexualism in life.

Contents

	<i>List of illustrations</i>	viii
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
	<i>Introduction</i>	1
Part I	Acting out	14
	1 The sham in shaman	15
	2 The Greek for it is ‘Gynaikiseōs’	35
	3 Skirting Christ	51
Part II	Stages of sodomy	69
	4 Orientations	70
	5 China trade	95
	6 Playboys and boy players	115
Part III	The mannish and the unmanned	143
	7 Arms and the woman	144
	8 Monstrous pleasures of the baroque	163
	9 Breeches birth	188
	10 Beldames sans merci	209
	11 The prince, the pauper and the pan	238
Part IV	Subcultures surface	271
	12 Putting on the drag	272
	13 The imp(ersonator) of the perverse	301
	14 Amateur hour	324

Part V	Children of the ghetto	346
15	Queens of clubs	347
16	Alternatives	378
17	Sex, drags and rock 'n' roll	410
18	Glad-ragging the Establishment	424
19	A gender of their own	445
	Afterword: from dressing up to dressing down	464
	<i>Index</i>	474

Illustrations

Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are from the author's collection. In those other cases, every effort has been made to contact copyright holders.

1	An adolescent effeminated shaman of the Koryak tribe with spirit-summoning drum	19
2	The hijra Amina Begum and members of her community laying a veil on the tomb of a Muslim saint in Basumati	24
3	A <i>batcha</i> performing at an all-male feast of the Sarts in Kokand, Tazhikistan	28
4	Relief of an hermaphrodite, believed to be a scene from a pantomime performed by the famous dancer Bathyllus	30
5	Men dancing, dressed as women	37
6	Bearded men in long chitons and mantles, carrying parasols	41
7	Tragic actor dressed for a female role and holding mask	44
8	'Our Lord of Esquipulas'	52
9	Italian marble statuette of seated Christ	53
10	An image reputed to be St Wilgefortis (St Kümmeris), leaning on a T-shaped cross, the symbol of reconciliation of duality	61
11	Luxuria (Lust) dancing before spectators	65
12	The 60-year-old Nakamura Senjaku applying the makeup for a beautiful young princess	71
13	The youth Kaguetsu in the <i>nō</i> play of that name, relating how he was kidnapped by mountain goblins	74
14	Early onnagata making up backstage	81
15	(a) Tamasaburō, as the amorous acolyte, clinging to his lover the monk Seigen (played by Morita Kanyai) in the prologue to <i>Sakura-hime Azuma Bunshō</i> (b) Tamasaburō as the acolyte's reincarnation, the Princess Sakura, departing the New Kiyomizu Temple along the <i>hanamichi</i>	87
16	Kazuo Ohno deconstructing the onnagata image, 1988	89
17	Chinese woodcut of the deity Lan Caiho	99
18	The traditional makeup for a <i>dan</i> in Beijing opera	102
19	The female impersonator in angelic guise: Mei Lanfang as a heavenly maiden in an attitude of prayer	104
20	The gender ambiguity of youthful beauty: (a) Albrecht Dürer's 1507 portrait of a young person (b) On-stage in England: Edward Kynaston, the boy player (c) Off-stage in England: Sir Antony Van Dyck's portrait of William Herbert, 6th Earl of Pembroke	122
21	Title page of Beaumont and Fletcher's <i>The Maidens Tragedy</i> (1619)	125

22 Two ways of dealing with homoeroticism in an all-male <i>As You Like It</i> : (a) Ignoring it: Jeremy Brett as Orlando and Ronald Pickup as Rosalind; (b) Exulting in it: the nuptial finale, directed by Werner Schroeter in Bochum, 1976	135
23 A current attempt at 'authenticity': Christian Camargo as Isabel Queen of France blessing the union of Princess Katherine (Toby Cockerill) and Henry V (Mark Rylance) in the final scene of <i>Henry the Fifth</i> at the Globe Theatre, London, 1997	136
24 Which is the real Moll Cutpurse? (a) The title page to Middleton and Dekker's play <i>The Roaring Girl</i> (1611); (b) A popular print, published by W. Richardson, London, alleged to be of Mary Frith herself	146
25 Rough Elsa coming on to Wolfdietrich; fifteenth-century woodcut illustration to the lay of <i>Wolfdietrich</i> in <i>Heldenbuch</i>	149
26 Professional entertainers, possibly both male, impersonating male and female wodehouses (wild people)	150
27 The unmanning of Joan of Arc: (a) A baroque engraving of La Pucelle, showing her with flowing hair, but in full armour, her legs on display; (b) An early nineteenth-century revision of the image covers her with a voluminous skirt and adds a simpering expression	152
28 A flyer advertising Paul Silve as a male Joan of Arc in Claude Merle's <i>Le Puceau d'Orléans</i> , Théâtre Roseau, Paris, 1988	154
29 Misako Watanabe in <i>Keshō (Makeup)</i> , 1982) by Hisashi Inoue	159
30 The frontispiece to Thomas Artus' <i>L'Isle des Hermaphrodites</i> (1605)	165
31 Arlequin, in a towering fontange and Columbine's garments, at the dressing-table	171
32 The unmasking of the supposed serving-maid in Asselijn's comedy <i>Jan Klaaz of gewaande dienstmaagd</i> in a painting by Cornelis Troost, 1738	173
33 George Mattocks as Achilles in Gay's opera	175
34 The off-stage moment in Scribe's <i>Le Soprano</i> when the Cardinal cannot restrain himself from kissing the supposed castrato	183
35 Mrs Greville as Sir Harry Wildair in <i>The Constant Couple</i>	195
36 Margaret Farrell as the suggestively fettered Captain Macheath in <i>The Beggar's Opera</i>	197
37 Pauline Viardot Garcia as Orphée in Gluck's opera	199
38 Beaumarchais' hand-picked cast for <i>Le Manage de Figaro ou Une Folle Journée</i> in 1787	201
39 Johanna Gadski as Cherubino and Mabel Riegelmann as the Countess in Mozart's <i>Le Nozze di Figaro</i> , c. 1905	202
40 The witch Rangda in the Balinese <i>barong-kelet</i>	211
41 David Garrick as Sir John Brute in <i>The Provok'd Wife</i> , at the line 'So! how d'ye like my Shapes now?'	215
42 Samuel Foote as Mrs Cole in <i>The Minor</i> , at the line 'My thoughts are fix'd upon a better place'	217
43 A poster advertising Neil Burgess as Aunt Abby in yet another revival of <i>The New County Fair</i>	220
44 The hag as benevolent agent: Samuel Simmons as Mother Goose in the seminal pantomime <i>Mother Goose and the Golden Egg</i>	223
45 The English music-hall comedian Malcolm Scott as a Gibson Girl	226
46 A flyer for Danny La Rue starring as Dolly Levi in the musical comedy <i>Hello Dolly!</i> , Prince of Wales Theatre, London	229
47 Advertising flyer for the Wimbledon Theatre, 1988	232
48 Louisa Cranstoune Nisbett as Philip Duke of Aragon in Aphra Behn's <i>The Young King</i>	241
49 Lucia Elizabeth Vestris as Don Giovanni	246

50 (a) Mary Anne Keeley as Jack Sheppard at the Adelphi Theatre, London; (b) Marie Laurent as Jack Scheppard (<i>sic</i>) in <i>Les Chevaliers du Brouillard</i> , at the Ambigu-Comique, Paris	246
51 Fanny Herring (1832–1906) as the Emigrant Boy	249
52 (a) Charlotte and Susan Cushman as Romeo and Juliet	252
(b) Charlotte Cushman as Romeo, a studio portrait	252
53 Pauline Virginie Déjazet, in <i>Le Vicomte de Léboriers</i>	258
54 Sarah Bernhardt as the Duc de Reichstadt in <i>L'Aiglon</i> in Act II	259
55 Poster for Edwin Kelly and Francis Leon	278
56 (a) Ernest Boulton in drag, seated right of his lover Lord Arthur Pelham Clinton	281
(b) Boulton in male street dress	281
57 Julian Eltinge in his greatest success <i>The Fascinating Widow</i> (1911)	286
58 Vardaman the Gay Deceiver (Mansel Vardaman Boyle)	289
59 'The Show Girl and the Johnnie': Bert Savoy and Jay Brennan	293
60 'A party of gay girls of New York Bohemian circles declare their independence by dispensing with male escorts during the masquerade ball season, and enjoy a period of pleasure unadulterated by masculine restraint'	303
61 Annie Hindle	305
62 The mystery of the absent: (a) Ella Wesner as Captain Cuff; (b) Louise Rott, German serio-comic, billed as a 'weibliche Gesangskomiker'	308
63 Vive la différence!	
(a) Gertie Millar, a typical principal boy, wide-hipped, high-heeled, with abundant tresses, in the musical comedy <i>The New Aladdin</i> (1906); (b) Vesta Tilley, slim-hipped, low-heeled, close-cropped	312
64 Gladys Bentley (a) in her nightclub days; (b) as a docile bed-maker preparing, as the caption has it, 'to make homecoming husband comfortable'	313
65 The <i>otoko-yaku</i> star Mitsuki Jun in a popular Takarazuka pose in a show called <i>La Passion</i>	318
66 The town fathers turn out to make fools of themselves on stage. Hampton, Iowa, a Womanless Wedding staged by De Roy Play Co	328
67 Naval cadets, West End, Morecambe, 1916	333
68 French POW Laval as the female lead in Cremieux and Decourcelle's play <i>L'Abbé Constantin</i> in the Théâtre de Rennbahn, Munster camp, First World War	335
69 An elaborate setting for an all-male French POW performance of <i>Théodore et Cie</i> , Théâtre de Rennbahn, Munster camp, First World War	336
70 Jim Dale as Terri Dennis impersonating Vera Lynn singing 'White Cliffs of Dover' in <i>Privates on Parade</i>	341
71 When a female impersonator could have his name in lights: Francis Renault advertised on Broadway in the late 1930s	348
72 A postcard handed out to visitors at the 82 Club Revue, directed by Kitt Russell, at East 4th Street and 2nd Avenue, New York City, 1950s	351
73 Minette with maritime admirers at the College Inn, Boston, in the early 1950s	353
74 Craig Russell as Judy Garland	357
75 Coccinelle before and after the operation: (a) In her Marilyn Monroe avatar with a bemused Bob Hope at Le Carrousel; (b) After surgery showing her scars	360

76 Coloured paper fold-out fan advertising the Jewel Box Lounge in Kansas City, Missouri, around 1960	364
77 A publicity photo of the company of La Grande Eugène in 1976	368
78 Men's toilets, Black Cap cabaret night, London 1989	370
79 Lindsay Kemp as Salome and David Haughton as John the Baptist	380
80 Copi in three of the six roles in <i>Le Frigo</i> , directed by Copi and Juan Stopani, 1983	383
81 The Angels of Light doing their thing on stage	388
82 The Cockettes take a break in a Venice, California, locale	390
83 The Cycle Sluts in all their glory	391
84 Candy Darling in the role of Hosanna B.Hump in <i>Give My Regards to Off Off Broadway</i> at Bastiano's Playwright's Workshop, 1967	394
85 Charles Ludlam in his dressing-room, preparing for <i>Salammbô</i>	397
86 The New York Dolls	412
87 David Bowie in white satin going down on the instrument of Mick Ronson, the lead guitarist of his band Spiders from Mars in 1972	414
88 Gene Harlot, lead singer of New York's glitter-band The Harlots of 42nd Street	415
89 While a barely glimpsed Columbia (Little Nell) massages Rocky (Peter Hinwood), Tim Curry as Dr Frank-n-Furter sings his creature the 'Charles Atlas Song', in the 20th Century-Fox film <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> (1975)	416
90 In the imagery generated by Culture Club, Boy George was invariably distinguished from the macho projections of his colleagues	420
91 In a Bangkok nightclub, a male Snow White mocks television commercials, December 1987	427
92 The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence lay hands on a sinner, San Francisco, 1980	431
93 Dame Edna Everage publicising her London show <i>Back with a Vengeance</i> , 1986	437
94 Evita Bezuidenhout as SA ambassador to the Homeland Republic of Bapetikosweti, wearing the party colours of the Afrikaner party and her patron Piet Botha	440
95 A flyer for Split Britches and Blooplips in <i>Belle Reprieve</i> , when it appeared at the Drill Hall Arts Centre in London	454
96 The performance artist Trash, during an appearance at Jackie Sixty, a cult den on West 14th Street, New York, 1992	457
97 The complexity of anatomical androgyny: Carol Cabochard, billed as 'A boy made in France', performing at a West Berlin drag club	459
98 Kate Bornstein communing with a fellow supernatural	460
99 Wilson Jermaine Heredia as Angel and Jesse L.Martin as her boyfriend in the New York Theatre Workshop production of <i>Rent</i> by Jonathan Larson	469
100 Barquette, bedecked in the traditional ostrich plumes and spangles	470

Acknowledgements

My first published research on cross-dressing appeared in 1982, as a contribution to a new Canadian theatre journal. My essay looked outrageously out of place, sandwiched between a reconstruction of eighteenth-century playhouses and an analysis of some of Ibsen's characters. Those were typical and academically reputable topics for discussion; an inquiry into the origins of male impersonation seemed marginal at best, suspect at worst. Yet that article stimulated more response than anything I had published to date. Enthusiastic letters and postcards suggested that there was an audience eager for more information on the subject.

Since then the marginal has become the mainstream. The trickle of interest evoked by my article has swollen to become the torrent of gender studies that has poured from the presses over the past two decades. Feminism, Foucauldian interpretations of sex, the body as an ideological construct, new ideas of self-fashioning were all tributaries that fed into this torrent. One cannot now open an issue of a journal of literary, historical or theatre studies without encountering a piece dealing with some aspect of transvestism. Taking into account so much fascinating and salient material has delayed this book, originally conceived in the mid-1980s, from coming to some kind of closure (conclusion is too strong a word). Even as I write these lines, new books are advertised which I must doggedly refuse to consult if I am ever to put a full stop to my own writing.

Whatever virtues this work may have in relation to others in the field result, I hope, from its synoptic and undogmatic approach. My own researches and experiences have led me to different conclusions from those of many of my predecessors; a life in the theatre alerts me to the fortuitous and often materialistic reasons for practices which have occasionally been theorized out of all reality. My ambivalent and incoherent responses as an audience member have also made me hesitant to ascribe generalized patterns of reaction to the public of the past or of different cultures. What I have been insistent on is the inherent sexuality of all performance, the ability of the live theatre to construct gender variants unencountered anywhere else, and an abiding 'queerness' in the most authentic types of theatre and its antecedents.

A book such as this, which covers so much ground and has been worked on for so long, owes debts to a great many individuals and institutions. Although extended lists of acknowledgements may seem pretentious to the world at large, they have meaning for those mentioned in them, so I cannot omit to publish here my gratitude to those whose names appear below.

First, thanks to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation which believed enough in what was at the time a wildly unconventional project to award me a grant that allowed me to devote a full sabbatical year to research. Then, to the many librarians and archivists and their assistants who generously aided my researches: Frau Gesine Bottomley and her staff at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin; Deborah Edel of the Lesbian Her story Archives; Betty Gubert of the New York Public Library; Jeanne Newlin, Honorary Curator, and the staff of Harvard Theatre Collection; Gwendolen Pershing of the Kinsey Institute for

Research, Indiana University; the staffs of the National Theatre Archives, Tokyo; the Treasure Room of the Harvard Law Library; and the British Library, London; as well as functionaries of the International Theatre Institute in a number of cities, especially Berlin, New York and Tokyo.

Thanks too to those who enabled me to acquire many rare items and images: the booksellers Tony Greene and Ivan Stormgart, and the ephemera and photography dealers Roberta Sackin Batt, Dave Belcher, Henry Deeks, Keith De Lellis, Mary Donaldson, Larry Gottheim, Janet Miller and Greg Smart.

I must thank those who included earlier versions of my work in their publications: Martin Banham, editor of *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*; the late Bill Como, publisher of *After Dark Magazine*; Wayne Dynes, editor of *The Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*; Leslie Ferris, editor of *Crossing the Stage*; Donald Mullin and Len Conolly, former editors of *Essays in Theatre*; Joel Schechter, former editor of *Theater*; and Don B. Wilmeth, co-editor of *The Cambridge Guide to American Theatre*.

Many individuals shared their specialized knowledge with me: Doris Abramson and David Cheshire regularly inundated me with relevant clippings and cuttings. Tsai Chin provided videotapes of Mei Lanfang. Two great dames Christopher Beeching and Colin Devereaux imparted technical information on performing pantomime. Mark Berger conveyed unpublished details on Julian Eltinge; Kathy Foley material on Southeastern Asia; Frank Hoff his articles on Kabuki; Veronica Kelly data on minstrelsy in Australia; Joseph Jeffreys writing on Ethyl Eichelberger; Gary Leupp insights into Tokagawa culture; Yvonne Noble her essay on John Gay; David Warner of the *Philadelphia City Paper* his reportage of college drag shows; and the late Martin Worman his memories of the Cockettes. My research in Japan was considerably aided and abetted by Ursula Bartlett-Imadegawa, Richard Emmert, Kosho Kadogaki, Shinko Matsumoto, Aya Mihara, Akira Mark Oshima, Jane Otte, Misako Watanabe, Masao Yamaguchi, and the staff of the Tokyo Kabuki-za.

I learned a great deal debating with the members of the Gender in the Humanities sequence of the Salzburg Seminars, held at Schloss Leopoldskron in 1988; particularly Alberta Arthurs, James Boone, Elaine Showalter and Jeffrey Weeks.

In discussion, a great many friends and colleagues contributed their ideas and suggestions or implemented my work, among them the late Geoffrey Ashton, Sally Banes, Neil Bartlett, the late Phil Blackwell, Jingsong Chen, Jim Davis, Jill Dolan, John Emigh, James Fisher, Paul B. Franklin, Amanda Gable of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, Judith Lynn Hanna, Conrad Harding of the Pilgrim House in Provincetown, Cynthia Jenner, Jonathan Ned Katz, Adrian Kiernander, Mario Klarer, Robert David Macdonald, Geraldine Maschio, Noreen Barnes-McLain, Brooks McNamara, Moe Meyer, the late John Preston, Abe Rybeck of Theatre Offensive, Virginia Scott, Ted Sod of the Chelsea Gay Association Theatre Project, Jonathan Strong, Lillian Tardiver, Martha Vicinus, Yutaka Wada, and Jud Young of *Body Politic*.

Nor can I fail to cite my companions at drag shows and performance art around the world, among them Henry Akina, The Revd Will Baynes, Christoff Bleidt, Charles Cermele, Robertson Dean, Kip Gould, Major Larry Hollingsworth, David Kaplan, Robert David Macdonald, Robert McCleary, Michael McDowell, Helen Palmer, Darcy Pulliam, Joshua Rifkin, Paul Schoenfeld and Peta Tate. Several of my graduate students aided in this project either as research assistants or as voluble members of my seminars on gender in performance: they include Tom Connolly, Sherry Darling, Pat Fina, Gary Genard, Christopher Newton, Julia Soyer, Jennifer Stiles and Fr Michael Zampelli. The warmest thanks of all go to my editors: Tracy C. Davis who solicited this book for the series Gender in Performance, and Talia Rodgers at Routledge. They sat for twin images of Patience on a monument while the work dragged on, so to speak, to its completion.

Introduction

I can quite easily think of opposites, but it isn't men and women.

Dame Rebecca West¹

Clothes reading

In the first years of the French Revolution, Restif de la Bretonne, that indefatigable commentator on his own morals and would-be reformer of his compatriots', turned his attention to sartorial abuses. He fulminated against the unwarranted adoption by one sex of the accoutrements of the other, warning that the deplorable popularity of paederasty in the classical world had been due to insufficient differentiation in male and female gender markings. To prevent a similar degeneration in his own society he insisted that each sex stick to its own wardrobe.

Let us then prevent our women from wearing men's hats, as they sometimes do. Let us prevent men from wearing women's shoes, English head-stalls, corselets resembling the surcoats of women, etc.... A woman in a man's hat and trousers has a hard, imperious, unlovable, antisocial personality. A man in pointed shoes is a fop, an effeminate, a trifler (*bagatellier*), a pederastomaniac or, at least, one of those nonentities who slavishly imitate whatever they behold.²

Restif's complaints have a familiar ring, intoned down the ages in sumptuary laws, *ex cathedra* anathemas, newspaper editorials, school dress codes. Boys must not wear long hair, earrings, high heels; girls must not wear short hair, trousers, or—simply fill in the blank.³ At the base of these injunctions lurks a primordial belief that gender tokens are magical, and to abuse them will transform and denature the abuser. It confuses signifier with signified, in its belief that the clothes which betoken gender also constitute it. Potency has been transferred from essential nature to adventitious attribute.

This is only natural, since the primary social role of clothing, distinct from its utilitarian functions of warmth and protection, is to render the gender of the wearer discernible at a glance. Even when the garments are seemingly unisex or not immediately distinguishable (as with the Attic chiton, the Samoan sarong, the Celtic kilt), men and women are assigned separate indices of gender, such as a manner of draping or pleating, a particular length or a style of ornament. Beyond certain occupational requirements, there is no consistency among civilizations as to which item of clothing will be assigned to which gender. The long gown, which is the only garment common to all female costume in Europe for over two thousand years, has also been worn by men and even today remains a uniform of dignity at traditional functions.⁴

In fact, such differences in clothing, even when a society invests considerable importance in them, rarely appertain to the basic level of materials or construction techniques, or even the formal level of assemblage: the separation of tailors for men's clothes from seamstresses and milliners for women's was a rather late development in Europe, connected more with distinction between homespun goods and external purchases than with basic gender differences. Gender differentiations in dress are generally made at secondary or tertiary levels: the points at which named garments are endowed with precise meaning, and when rules regarding how garments are to be worn are established. In this respect, the rule determining whether one wears trousers or skirt is no more fundamental than that deciding which handkerchief goes with which tie.⁵

However, since clothing, rather than any unveiled physical attributes, is the standard marker for gender, the cross-dresser and the androgyne are often confused. This confusion has led to Marjorie Garber's siting the transvestite, rather than the androgyne, at the crux of civilization, and defining transvestism as the substance of gendered systems. The arbitrary semiotic system is misread as those essentials for which it stands: the extrinsic and incidental tokens or badges elected by a community to make sure distinctions are taken to be intrinsic and immanent.

A good deal of philosophic and poetic effort has gone into defining the essence of androgyny, attempting to recover or re-create it as an ultimate boon. Most cultures, at least in their early stages, may deify or idealize an androgynous principle, but, outside their religious practices, seldom seek to embody it. When it does occur in nature, as in the birth of a teratological hermaphrodite, attitudes change. The perfect fusion of genders in androgyny is now seen as an imperfect hybrid, less, not more than the sum of its private parts. Such a creature is customarily ostracized, destroyed or else segregated to a sanctified periphery. When a specific gender is chosen for it, clothing is used to declare this gender. Pictorially, true androgynes are shown naked or partially naked, displaying the anatomical sexual attributes of unclothed men and women: their nature is best demonstrated stripped bare. Traditional cross-dressing rarely intends fusion, the *sine qua non* of androgyny, but rather gender division through choice of one polarity or other. Whatever androgynous qualities it may possess tend to be adventitious.

The transvestite therefore falls under the category of what Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty calls pseudo-androgynes, a category which also includes such liminal figures as twins, the eunuch, the sexual masquerader, the transsexual, the pregnant male and the alternating androgyne.⁶ Whereas the ideal androgyne has various modes of coming into existence, the transvestite can do so in only one way, by changing clothes. Anthropological evidence provides any number of reasons why one identifies with the opposite sex by temporarily or permanently donning its clothing: the transfer of experience of the other, the desire to deceive supernatural beings, sexual allure; but in every case a magical symbol is involved.⁷

Mixing and matching, let alone switching, the signs a culture uses to distinguish gender spells danger. If essence of gender can be simulated through wigs, props, gestures, costumes, cross-dressing implies that it is not an essence at all, but an unstable construct.⁸ Gender assignment which at first looks to be deeply rooted in biological imperatives and social exigencies turns out to be no more essential than table manners. Therefore, most taboos against cross-dressing, except when they are rooted in religious belief, are related less to 'elemental' or 'fundamental' concepts of gender than to codes of conduct and social status.

First impressions

In tribal communities all institutions cooperate in determining and shaping gender, so that, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrated,⁹ the opposition between *confusing the sexes* and *differentiating the sexes* becomes an important antinomy in folk religion and mythology. In most cases, the problem is not to split a primal androgyne into male and female; rather it is to distinguish the male from the female, which is often regarded

as the primordial state. Rites and ceremonies are established to mark these distinctions, frequently incorporating transvestism as an essential ingredient both during the religious occasion and within the larger patterns of social interaction.¹⁰

For the Soromaja, Hua and Gimi tribes of New Guinea, an unborn human is a glob of psychic energy, an amalgam of both parents' natural fluids, representing an hermaphroditic ancestor who possessed a penis-clitoris and female breasts. When this foetal androgyne is born, it is said to be essentially female until made into a male. How can such an undifferentiated creature slough off its femaleness and become a pure and integral male? Only through initiation rites, by avoiding females, by ingesting semen, and by symbolically expelling the female substances it was either born with or absorbed from breast-feeding. During the male initiation cycle, these substances must be extruded from the boys' bodies, especially their heads, by bleeding and abstinence from female food. To make a man one must have recourse to contrasting images.

Among these tribes, 'male' and 'female' represent two halves of the cosmos, each an integral unit with specific roles and functions complementing the work of the other. Good order is upheld only by maintaining a rigid separation, cooperation of the two halves being indispensable to life. Crossing boundaries or blurring frontiers between the halves, enacting the role of the other, entails chaos, death and disease. This strict segregation of men and women is separate but not morally equal. No Soromaja male will touch the instruments used to prepare sago or anything considered female, for the 'taint' would blight him. At the same time, the themes of male dominance and female subordination that saturate their rituals and taboos convey a male covetousness of female physiological powers. New Guinean myths grant that it was women who originally owned the cult house and who discovered the power of the totemic flutes. Men at that time were barred from the rituals; with supernatural aid, they waged a war, stole the flutes and took the cult house by force. Their victory sealed the consequent exclusion of women from the cult.¹¹

The entire culture is organized around the ritual stealing and guarding of the sacred flutes, because of the need for male self-definition. If the men did not steal and guard the flutes they would remain foetus-like, a mere phallic appendage to woman. But women take their revenge in skits performed during marriage ceremonies and initiations, when they mimic an obsolete cannibal feast with a dummy corpse. In this orgy, wives and mothers dance through the throng and compel the male players protecting the dummy to back off; then, howling and beating their breasts, they dismember the effigy and fight for the parts to be eaten. The bamboo flutes they lost to men are returned to them emblematically by an anthropophagic ingestion of an artificial penis.¹²

Contrast this simulation of the cannibal feast with the circumcision ceremony of the Walbiri of Central Australia, an initiation rite enabling boys to cast off any vestigial female characteristics. Men imitate the sounds and movements of women dancing: as they utter high-pitched yelps and jump up and down, knees bent and feet splayed, the flapping, subincised penis spattering blood on the dancer's leg simulates menstruation.¹³ Among the Hua-Gimi, blood-letting has risen beyond imitation and actual scarification to a symbolic phase. Once actual dismemberment and bloodshed have been sublimated into mimic representations, the next step is emblematic cross-dressing, which prefigures an acting out of mythic scenarios. So in Masai circumcision ceremonies, the boy candidates do not violently reject female qualities. They don the earrings and ground-touching garments worn by married women until their penile wound has healed; only then do they assume the pelts, ornaments of warriors and plaited hair of mature men. To adapt to their own sex, they must first assimilate the gender attributes of the opposite sex.¹⁴ Cross-dressing enables this act of sympathetic imagination, and the norms of society are reinforced.

Mistaken identities

That gender is the product of social technologies, institutionalized discourses, everyday behaviour and critical perception has been an axial plank in the feminist theoretical platform. 'The sex-gender system... is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning... to individuals within the society' is how Teresa De Lauretis puts it.¹⁵ Such a concept has become the shibboleth of modern (and postmodern) thought about gender and cross-gender. The term 'gender role' gained currency, since a role is assumed and built; it is an extrapolation on to one's nature, just as a stage role is an assumption by an actor. The gender and the self were seen as two distinct entities.

This had, in fact, long been the position of the psychiatric establishment, whose textbooks regularly distinguished between *gender identity* and *gender role*. The former meant the unity and persistence of one's individuality as male, female or ambivalent, privately expressed through one's self-awareness. The latter was the public expression, through mien or speech, indicating the degree to which one is male, female or ambivalent, and, though linked to sexual arousal and response, was not restricted to them.¹⁶ The clinical tenet was that gender dysfunction occurs during a pronounced slippage between identity and role. It is noteworthy that these definitions derive from the 1950s, when, in the North American experience at least, a profound if repressed cultural concern over gender identity motivated absolutist notions of male and female.

In arguing over the substantiality or illusory nature of the female identity, feminist theory first embraced the idea that all gender is masquerade, which denotes a false face laid over the real one. The transgressive power of masquerade to overthrow socially dictated roles and effect a form of personal liberation has been argued in studies of Georgian London by Terry Castle.¹⁷ But what seemed plausible in an eighteenth-century context became a rib-bone of contention when applied to the question: what constitutes a woman? The French psychoanalyst Joan Rivière had argued that masquerade was the fundamental point of femininity, that 'all women are female impersonators'; but later Luce Irigaray defined masquerade as a false vision of femininity arising from a woman's awareness of a male desire for her as his opposite.¹⁸ There were two fundamental flaws in Irigaray's formulation: ontologically, it presumed a hypothetically 'authentic' femininity; politically, it condemned masquerade to be not a creative act, but an inferior's other-directed survival strategy. Michèle Montrelay extended Irigaray's position even further to argue that women are incapable of representing a negative quality; unable to lose or repress their child-bearing bodies, they manifest an extreme proximity to their bodies that precludes representation.¹⁹ In other words, woman can only be, she cannot play at another. Peremptory as this sounds, it offers a non-demeaning thesis to explain why women have not been allowed to serve as actors in many cultures.

Support came from film theory and its definition of the conditions of female subjectivity. Mary Anne Doane suggested that because feminine masquerade was incapable of disguising gender successfully, it had a subversive or disruptive function. She was careful to distinguish it from the sort of cross-dressing which seeks to pass: 'Masquerade is not as recuperable as transvestism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask—the decorative layer then conceals a non-identity... The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance.'²⁰

The problem with the masquerade approach to gender is that its distinction between the real and the false is almost Manichaeian (or perhaps Platonic, in its implication that the real is better, more authentic, than the assumed). It is tied to the sociologist's search for a 'fixed code' or 'deep structure' underlying surface behaviour, but since this deep structure has to be imputed from surface elements and cannot be known except through them, the whole exercise becomes a circular one. Western thought has a tendency to seek the static and constant behind the fluid and mutable, a tendency Norbert Elias has called 'process-reduction', whereby 'the changeless aspects of all phenomena [are] interpreted as most real and significant'.²¹ Somehow, it is believed, in probing one's gender, the mask and the face will ultimately be distinguishable

from one another. The dilemma can be heard in the plaint of a part-time male transvestite celebrating the fluidity permitted by masquerade while deploring it as a diversion from the quest for a true self: 'When I was in drag nothing seemed impossible. Drag allowed me the separate identity to do, act and react to people who would never get to know who I was. [But] I wanted to find my real identity. Drag, drinking, and drugs were all distractions from this process.'²² The liberating aspect of transvestism is seen as a subterfuge, which, for all its potency, shuns authenticity.

A less judgemental approach was to return to the theatrical processes of creating or building a 'role' and to hypothesize the 'performative' nature of gender, a thesis expounded most fully by Judith Butler. In this postulation, we are not dissembling when we perform gender: it may be 'unnatural', an artifice insofar as we created it, but with its own integrity and not simply a superficiality overlying some other reality. This applies to men as well to women. Gender is no longer a disguise that has to be stripped away, but a congeries of actions, statements, appearances, constantly in flux. Transvestism is simply an appliance to enhance the performativity.

Except in its specific application to gender, little of this was new. The notion of the reactive 'characterless character' goes back as far as Strindberg and the Nancy school of psychiatry, and was recycled by Erwin Goffman in sociological terms. Most of this theory, however, was concerned with the everyday processes of human thought and behaviour. What happens, however, when the self-conscious act of confecting an identity by means of gendered clothing does not simply adapt to normative styles of gender, but hyperbolizes and competes with them? 'When', in Rosalind Morris' words, 'habitual acts are brought into consciousness and objectified, they are transformed; practice becomes representation, and everyday acts become strategies that presume a timeless or totalized vision.'²³ Dressing for success to further one's career has little to do with drag and masquerade which tend to parody, not to naturalize, gender. Dragging up to pass as a man or to be rented as a prostitute are more blatantly performative acts than putting on a regimental tie or a Chanel suit.

As Johan Huizinga noted back in the 1920s, 'dressing up' is the most vivid expression of ludic secrecy, interweaving childhood terrors, sheer pleasure, mystic fantasy and sacred awe. It makes the esoteric exoteric. When Magnus Hirschfield launched the term 'transvestism', he meant it as a variety of fetishism, a temporary state of sexual gratification achieved by cross-dressing. The desired effect may take place in private before a mirror or it may require an outside spectator; but the donning and doffing of the signs of gender offer an illusion of an essence. Its effects may be unsettling, even traumatizing, but since the effects derive from a semblance, they require an audience.²⁴

Stage business

In trying to clarify gender identities in society, theorists showed no particular interest in the special case of the theatre. Performativity occluded performance. Yet for the transsexual lesbian actor Kate Bornstein, 'I see theater as the performance of identity, which is acknowledged as a performance. We're always performing identities, but when we *consciously* perform one, and people acknowledge our performance it's theater.'²⁵ The performing arts provide the most direct, most graphic, often most compelling representations of gender; however, their form and function are often at odds with the concerns of everyday life or even with the common sanctions of society. The methods and motives of the performer involve different mechanisms and are less rooted in personal psychological concerns than those of the Goffmanian projector of self in everyday life.

When her early formulations were criticized for neglecting such distinctions, Butler responded by positing a dialectical relationship between the sociocultural 'constitutive constraint' and the agency or

subversion of that constraint.²⁶ This allows for finer discrimination in the investigation of highly deliberate constructions of gender, such as those performed by theatrical transvestism. Earlier feminist theory of gender performativity had been grounded in the concept of the male gaze (a concept invented to study film, a static form whose observer's *optique* is severely constricted). It accepted the traditional definition of the theatre as *speculum mundi* and so inquired into who is doing the looking and at whose reflection. Women's subjectivity, this school argued, was in fact absent from the theatre, except as it was configured as the other by male imaginations; some critics went so far as to declare that the traditional theatre was wholly a male preserve for the appropriation and exclusion of women. Only the women re-invented by a male-dominated system could be reflected in this looking-glass. From this standpoint the political uses of transvestism were laudable: lesbian drag was welcomed as an exposé of this cartel of the male imagination, and contemporary alternative performance as a charivarian overthrow of the imposed gender roles. 'While drag is a joke trivialized in the camp context,' Jill Dolan pointed out, 'as a feminist theatrical device meant to point to real-life gender costuming, its effect is quite different.'²⁷

By dismissing all pre-contemporary uses of gender illusion as repressive masculinist fantasizing, this kind of rhetoric obscured the immense complexity and variety of theatre gender impersonation. Neither the false face of masquerade nor the lamellations of personal identity fit comfortably on to the professional actor. The dramatic actor is defined by the assumption of another's identity for a discrete period of time: the actor has to become the other while still being anchored to a personal identity. Actors may employ the techniques of shape-changing shamans or magicians, but without the involuntary yielding to an outside afflatus. Just as the shaman who lacks inspiration uses external means to simulate or excite trance, the actor effects his transformations with similar auxiliaries. But, in the process, 'how can you tell the dancer from the dance?' The operator is interwoven in the operations, may temporarily be effaced; or, in the words of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, 'Acte technique, acte physique, acte magico-religieux sont confondus pour l'agent.'²⁸ The actor's identity may melt within the magma of the character without losing self-consciousness; inspiration may possess the actor, but distinct elements of the actor's personality continue to float in the 'character'. Even when actors are criticized for 'playing themselves', the Stanislavskian concept of 'becoming' a character is purely figurative. No one ever plays oneself on stage, even though selective aspects of a personality or a manner may be enlarged and transmitted.

In Garber's statement that 'transvestite theatre is the Symbolic on the stage',²⁹ there is less than meets the eye, simply because the theatre is, by nature, a symbol-making art. Anything put on stage automatically assumes an aura of extra significance; it is apprehended in a manner which lends it greater meaning than when it is encountered outside the theatre. The simplest word or gesture delivered from a stage can rivet attention and evoke a host of emblematic, semiotic, metaphoric and, of course, symbolic possibilities. Then to claim that stage transvestism is the symbol of symbols somehow abates the alchemy achieved by the theatrical performance of gender.

In the most striking cases, the transvestite theatre does not symbolize some pre-existing reality so much as it establishes a new reality. The process is culinary: a good cook can translate raw liver into a refined pâté, which is not a 'symbol' of liver but a totally new synthesis, a Gestalt or sublimation far more complex than its basic ingredients. The educated palate may try to discern the various components but the residual taste is superior to any of them. In much the same way, the theatrical performance of gender, especially when it is cross-dressed, transcends the function of symbology to the act of creating something different from the reality on which it is based. Elements of masculine, feminine or androgyne observed in life become refracted through the theatrical presentation: if the stage is a mirror, it is a funhouse mirror, magnifying, distorting, and ultimately sending out an image in which the shock of recognition is promoted by an alienation effect.

This is accomplished because the actor's shifts of gender are accomplished primarily through the public presentation of his or her own body. Here we return to Hirschfeld's association of the transvestite's need for an audience with sexual gratification. In the chaotic disorder of postwar Berlin, the young actor Klaus Kinski was cast to play the woman in Jean Cocteau's monologue *La Voix humaine*; prohibited by the military government, it was eventually staged in a private club to sold-out houses with Cocteau's blessing. Kinski, a heterosexual cocksman of epic prowess, sought to get under the skin of woman.

At night I went out in full drag: panties, bra, garters, and high heels. Not to flaunt anything, but for my own sake. Dressing like a woman struck me as natural, as a matter of course, because I felt like a woman once the metamorphosis began. I was fully conscious of being a woman.³⁰

Kinski's approach seems to represent a standard Stanislavskian *modus operandi*: to inhabit a character through self-identification. However, traditionally the 'System' requires emotional identification, a 're-experiencing' (*perezhivanie*) of the character's psychology. Kinski's technique was to adopt the outward appearance of the character and test it against a reality existing outside the theatre: his 'becoming a woman' occurred because his appearance as a woman was validated by the real-life observer. Characteristically, he went out alone and at night, allowing these observers to assume he was a prostitute; his feeling like a woman was associated with the sexual attraction he exerted, wholly by means of his looks.

Displaying the body to the gaze of others automatically implies the availability of that body for sexual exploitation. Merely by coming on stage, an actor of any gender becomes a site for erotic speculation and imagination. The act of cross-dressing is the paradigm for acting since it directs the attention to the enigma of the actor's body and leaves the spectator with troubling memories, unanswered questions. In explaining why so many of the productions of his troupe Gloria are structured around the putting on and taking off of clothes, Neil Bartlett has reported

the deep feeling that you put the show on, you inhabit it, you say what you've got to say through the medium of the costume, make-up, genre that you're adopting, and then you may go away but the genre, the voice, the costume, the make-up stays there and has an uncanny life of its own which you speak through for the duration of the performance.³¹

(I am old-fashioned enough to believe that the flesh-and-body human on a stage has more potency, especially in the reconfiguration of gender, than do film and video. The powerful images diffused by canned media are apprehended differently and in a safer atmosphere: their dimensions and unchanging repeatability alter the nature of the confrontation of spectator and performer. That is why I have confined my observations in this book to live performance.)

I find the changing room to be an apt metaphor, because it points up the temporary nature of the transformation. In sports facilities, changing rooms are where athletes kit up to display their prowess, whether as the robotic behemoths of American football or the near-naked aquatics of the swimming competition. In clothing stores, the customer tries on a new look inside the changing room, requiring no other audience than the reflection in the mirror. When actors apparel themselves in areas known as dressing-rooms, tiring-rooms, *loges*, the change occurs only at the point when they step on to the stage and test their transformation against the reception of the spectators. Consummated in this space shared by shape-changer and audience, the change becomes an interchange.

The unsettling nature of actors' bodies has dictated their status as outsiders. In most pre-modern societies, with a few remarkable exceptions, the professional actor has been ranked at the bottom of the

system, classified with slaves and gladiators in Imperial Rome, with rogues and vagabonds in early modern England, with prostitutes and grave-diggers in Tokugawa Japan. These sanctions stood in sharp contrast to the adoration lavished on the actor by the public. Both the opprobrium and the admiration directed at actors is analogous to that directed at women. It is therefore considered no great stretch for a male actor to play a woman; already an 'other', subservient, restricted and dependent, his own experiences contribute to the impersonation.³² When the actor's sexual identity is also suspect or proscribed, when he himself prefers men as love objects, the impersonation can be even more convincing. Women who change their gender are more problematic: on the one hand, they seem to threaten by usurping male prerogative, but on the other, their transformations can be interpreted as yet one more adornment to an already available body.

'God has given you one face, and you make your selves another' was one of Hamlet's denunciations of womankind. It could as easily be applied to actors. Organized societies are fond of characterizing their institutions as God-given: one's place in that society is divinely predetermined. To change it is to defy God and to deceive one's fellow-man. In the eyes of the anti-theatricalist, when actors apparel themselves in another gender, they are merely carrying to the logical extreme the deception in which they normally engage. When he inveighs against cross-dressing on the stage, as the Elizabethan pamphleteer Stephen Gosson did, he construes it as a lie:

that in Stage Playes for a boy to put on the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a meane person to take vpon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and train, is by outward signes to she we them selues otherwise than they are, and so with in the compasses of a lye.³³

A youth pretending to be a woman is equated with a commoner pretending to be a nobleman: to pass oneself off as something other than what one is socially defined to be is worse than presumption. It is damnable deceit. It disrupts the divinely appointed order of things.

Similarly, in his overheated attack on stage plays, John Rainoldes insists that an actor is indeed an errant rogue, 'for his chief essence is, *A daily Counterfeit*. . . . His [profession] is compounded of all Nature, all humours, all professions.'³⁴ The foundations of social stability—the ascertainable natures of an individual's identity, residence and vocation—are undermined by this feigning. The rogue and the whore feign to cheat, so why should the actor's aims be different? His very calling makes him lawless and immoral. The actor, male or female, by exposing the body, is a tempter, his profession a gang of 'profane men and shameless women who go about corrupting youth', 'altogether lascivious and libidinous'. In the eyes of these critics, the stage is defined by its playing with gender, 'women dressing as men and boys as women'.³⁵ The changing room of the theatre, open to the public, presents its greatest threat in gender metamorphosis.

The rants of the anti-theatricalists, hysterical as they are, have more than a germ of truth in them. However much the theatre has been pressed into service to endorse and advertise society's values, it is staffed by a suspect and marginal personnel. How is the theatre to serve the establishment when its exponents are condemned as anti-establishment? Historically, it has always walked this knife-edge: a socially sanctioned institution with roots in religion and myth, expected to clarify and convey the establishment ethos in a public forum; and, a haven for outcasts, misfits and uncomfortable temperaments of all stripes, offering opportunities for self-expression that are otherwise unavailable. Much of the theatre's excitement comes from this dynamic, an oscillating tension between these two callings. The theatre is constantly eluding controls and violating the terms of its social compact. Like a recessive gene, its magical and shamanic origins keep cropping up. It tends to mingle the fleshly and the divine, the accessibly human and the unreachable ideal, in unsettling ways. Its effects are heavily erotic, and offer the audience unorthodox examples and alternatives.

The animosities directed at cross-dressing, homosexual practices and the performing arts are part of an ideological tangle, in which the various strands of fear and prejudice are hopelessly knotted together. Civil and religious authorities have always directed attacks on any organisms which contradict their authority until the evolution of mores favours the integration of such communities by paralysing and then annihilating their original subversive tendencies. The nexus between theatre and prostitution has been a commonplace of moralistic attack on both institutions, and in its drive for respectability over the past three hundred years, the Western theatre has tried to sublimate the connection and to establish claims as high art, something standing above the needs of the flesh. This may be wrongheaded, for it cuts off a primary source of the theatre's dynamic: its appeal to the libido is also a channel back to its magical beginnings. To appear on stage is to display one's body to strangers: a commodity available to the common gaze may, in given circumstances, be vendible in its entirety. The inscription of gender as allure, in a more blatant manner than society approves, becomes one of the theatre's most potent attractions, and, to the authorities, one of its most dangerous features. Since the object of desire is traditionally woman, the actual deployment of women and the use of surrogates, such as boys and young men, becomes problematic; but in both cases, the gender signals sent from the stage are more powerful than those transmitted in ordinary life. The prostitudinal aspect of theatre makes its performance of gender especially dynamic.

What complicates the relationship of the theatre to prostitution is that the theatre does not act but enacts, offers not actuality but fantasy. Intercourse with a transgendered shaman was dangerous; the union with the divine essence demanded servitude and self-abnegation. Intercourse with a cross-dressed sacral prostitute diminished the danger, since the medium was not so much possessed by the god as a surrogate for it: the fleshly begins to edge out the religious, without losing its religious sanction. The transvestitic actor still possesses vestiges of magical prestige, but here, even when the actor is sexually available, the transvestism is divested of any divine consummation. The man playing woman and woman playing man are the ultimate tease, being at the same time more and less than what they seem. Actors indulge not in gender-crossing but in gender-mixing, and offer a polymorphism more desirable than attainable.

By nature a 'queer' institution, the theatre is most itself when challenging the norms of its ambient culture. One of its most powerful means of doing so is shape-changing, particularly with regard to sex and gender. This is why Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* is at pains to explain the cross-dressing of the acting troupe as a phase in his protagonist's journey towards maturity.³⁶ Goethe was particularly alert to the erotic *frisson* produced by sexual transformation, and the ways in which it offers opportunity to explore the spectrum of passion. In his description of carnival in Rome he observed, 'everyone is curious, among the many male forms which seem to sit there, to seek out the feminine and perhaps to discover in a cute officer the object of his passion'.³⁷ The transvestism that for Goethe unfolded a spectrum of desire, for Genet offered the supreme opportunity for sub version. To mimic the opposite sex (or race) constitutes the greatest profanation of all, because, as Artaud writes, on stage bodies and feelings become compounded. 'To play love is to imitate love, but to mimic love is to demystify love, to mimic power is to demystify power, to mimic ritual is to demystify ritual.'³⁸ Or as our contemporaries would say, to deconstruct these entities in order to reveal their artificial nature.

Cross-dressing in the theatre thus engages with more than concerns about gendered personal identity: it invokes aspects of divinity, power, class, glamour, stardom, concepts of beauty and spectacle, the visible contrasted with the unseen or concealed. The much-quoted notion of transvestism as a 'confusion of categories' and a locus of cultural anxiety loses much of its validity when applied to theatrical cross-dressing. It has to be said, first of all, that the terms 'anxiety' and 'crisis' have been bandied about pretty loosely by cultural materialists. The temptation is understandable: it is highly dramatic to characterize a phenomenon as being in a state of crisis. Borrowing heavily from psychoanalytic theory, academics have

posited that every issue of sex and gender, at any historical moment, whatever the context, perspires anxiety. Gender is seen as so unstable that any action relating to it must be an attempt to either shore it up or demolish it.

By opposing the transvestite to a rigid set of binaries, man/woman, Garber essentially endorses the pioneer sexologists' formula of a 'third sex'. Her much-quoted remark that the transvestite creates a traumatic 'crisis of category', which makes the very foundations of personal identity quake, is grounded in such a system of classification.³⁹ One has to bear in mind that the categories in question are not natural, but the artificial and mutable constructs of given circumstances; in this respect, the transvestite in the theatre does not confute or elude categories; it creates new ones. The actor, cross-dressed or not, resembles the *nadleehi* or berdache of the Navajo, 'simultaneously male, female and hermaphrodite', or Nanabush, the central hero figure in Cree mythology, described by the gay Cree dramatist Tomson Highway as 'neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or...both simultaneously'.⁴⁰ No potentiality is foreclosed.

The categories themselves, rather than being in crisis, are ignored for fresh configurations of gender never seen outside the theatre. The *onnagata* and *wakashu* of Kabuki, the dame and principal boy of English pantomime are only superficially connected to any off-stage gender categories. When Mei Lanfang selected and recombined elements from two separate Beijing opera techniques for performing women in order to create a more multi-faceted character, his concern was not to find a better way to impersonate an actual woman or even a socially constructed idea of femininity. His interest lay in expanding his own performance opportunities; incidental to this, his stage women were endowed with more dimensions, wholly unrelated to the experience and presentation of quotidian femininity. Even the drag queens of pre-Disney 42nd Street wished not to appear as woman but as larger than life, as ultra-glamorous, in-your-face superwoman.⁴¹

Moreover, if true transvestites in life were to play roles in the theatre, their interior lives, hitherto led in abjection, would blossom; the role would authorize cross-dressers to lay innocent claim to their liberated condition, by channelling their inner feelings and physical appearance into the action and dialogue which, through the character, represent the cultural acceptance of gender. Because the modern actor as an individual is hedged round with a universal social respect and adulation which may be as unbalanced and unjustified as the ancient condemnations that overwhelmed him, the actor's private life tends to be dissociated from the characters he plays (Hollywood press agency and the naïveté of tabloid readers aside). So, for the performer with transvestitic penchants, the stage offers licence and liberty, not anxiety and crisis.

Although stage-gender types can be located on a gamut running from extreme masculinity to extreme femininity, the individual type is multi-planar: it layers and interfoliates the different signs of gender to destabilize categorical perceptions of male or female. Watching such a figure in action is like looking through a stacked set of photographic plates or film-frames through which a multiplicity of images is superimposed on the eye. Stage-gendered creatures are chimeras which elude the standard taxonomies and offer alternatives to the limited possibilities of lived reality. That these alternatives cannot exist outside the realm of the theatre makes them all the more cogent to the imagination.

In the traditional Christmas pantomime, for instance, the principal boy played by a woman and the dame played by a male comedian are not evading the standard gender binary to become a third entity. Rather, they are establishing a Pantoland binary, in which maleness plays almost no part. Sexual (or at least, romantic) viability is located in young women, whether dressed as male or female; comic impotence is invested in old women, whether played by male or female. The world of Victorian panto is one devoid of male authority (the Demon King was always vanquished by the Fairy Queen) and the realities of heterosexuality displaced to a Utopian, pre-sexual child's world. This is why such innovations as male rock stars as the principal boy or Danny La Rue's introduction of the drag-queen dame upset the now traditional *données* of the genre. The other-worldly illusion is broken by the intrusion of potential sexual fulfilment.

Similarly, the Tokugawa kabuki, an all-male performance form, does not offer the onnagata or female impersonator simply as a challenge to male/female binaries. The onnagata is a sophisticated contrivance, incorporating the sodomitical attraction of the beautiful youth, the refined charms of the female courtesan and the awe-inspiring technique of the expert actor. She is not the polar opposite of the rough hero, but rather one stage along a spectrum of gender combinations, including the *wakashu* or soft youth who retains his male garb and appearance while presenting a more feminine (and hence more acceptable to Japanese women) allurements. Ironically, when the *wakashu* is played by a woman, the result is the *otoko-yaku* of the Takarazuka revue, who comes across to a Western observer as a Barbie-like modulation of a butch lesbian. Such reconfigurations of the objects of desire do not stir up anxiety or cause crisis, any more than Shakespeare's invention of Caliban and Ariel caused audiences to tremble for their identities as human beings. (Here I have to reiterate that it is the performer—audience relationship that matters. Rarely did the reformers who fulminated against theatrical practices actually experience what they claimed to define; and this tends to hold true for many modern thinkers as well.)

The transvestite in performance rarely displaces dichotomous systems of sex and gender; and to look at the cross-dressed actor solely in that light runs the risk of accepting uncritically, even bolstering conventional concepts of sexual dimorphism. To define the stage transvestite solely as a third alternative and to relegate fluidity and ambiguity exclusively to such an alternative is to overlook the wide range of reinventions of masculine and feminine within the theatrical frame. The Elizabethan boy actor playing Rosalind playing Ganymede may seem androgynous, but is not an androgyne. A trained professional, who incidentally exuded an ambiguous physical appeal, enacts a fictional girl who in turn enacts a fictitious youth. Since the process begins with an adolescent who by definition is not wholly a man and can be identified sodomitically with a woman, his primary disguise does not so much belie his physical reality as enhance it. The second disguise, working upon stage characters rather than audience, then increases spectatorial pleasure by multiplying erotic possibilities and again offers a chance to admire the skill in juggling so many identities. There is in this no postmodern desire to deconstruct socially imposed form or to provoke and then allay cultural anxieties. Instead, the impulse is to create something never seen on land or sea and thus to distract and enchant an audience. Rather than confounding categories it invents new ones, providing fresh matter for desire, and releases the spectator's imagination and libido by an ever-changing kaleidoscope of gender.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in S.Blow, 'Taking down his name and a dress', *Spectator*, 18 June 1994, p. 36.
- 2 II. Bachelin (ed.), *L'Oeuvre de Restif de la Bretonne*, Paris, Edition du Trianon, 1932, vol. 9, pp. 253–4. Restif was a devoted foot fetishist, which may explain some of his animus.
- 3 For a précis of American court decisions about student hair length, see L.Kanowitz, *Sex Roles in Law and Society*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1973, pp. 634–44.
- 4 Y.Deslandres, *Le Costume image de l'homme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1976, pp. 242–3.
- 5 O.Burgelin and M.-T.Basse, 'L'unisexe. Perspectives diachroniques', *Communications*, 1987, p. 280.
- 6 W.Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 282.
- 7 J.C.Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), New York, International Universities Press, 1971, p. 1210.
- 8 M.Hunt, 'Girls will be boys', *Women's Review of Books*, September 1989.
- 9 C.Lévi-Strauss, 'Structure et dialectique', *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris, Pion, 1958.
- 10 A mid-century study of seventy-six non-Western societies revealed that forty-nine of them sanctioned some form of cross-dressing. C.S.Ford and F.A.Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behavior*, New York, Harper, 1951.

- 11 G.Oosterwal, 'The role of women in the male cults of the Soromaja in New Guinea', in A.Bharati (ed.), *The Realm of the Extra-Human. Agents and Audiences*, The Hague, Mouton, 1976, pp. 323, 327–32. A classic essay on the construction of gender identities in New Guinea societies is S. Lindenbaum, 'The mystification of female labors', in J.F.Collier and S.J.Yamagisako (eds), *Gender and Kinship. Essays Towards a Unified Analysis*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987.
- 12 P.R.Sanday (ed.), *Divine Hunger. Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 62, 66, 74–7, 85–9. Sanday points out (p. 147) a similar complementary revenge ritual in the Iroquoian creation myth, when men break up the paradise of the parthenogenetic woman; but warriors and women are complementary, interdependent for validation and status fulfilment.
- 13 S.A.Wild, 'Women as men: female dance symbolism in Walbiri men's rituals', *Dance Research Journal*, 1977–78, vol. 10, pp. 15–19.
- 14 E.Crawley, *Dress, Drinks and Drums. Further Studies of Savages and Sex*, London, Methuen, 1931, pp. 140–4. It would be a mistake to assume that institutionalized male transvestism is more likely to appear in societies founded on values of martial valour than in others. In their study of seventy-three primitive societies, Robert and Ruth Munroe found that only the quantitative contribution of the males to the subsistence economy, not the degree of task differentiation from females, was predictive of male transvestism. A society is likely to institutionalize a male transvestite role if high subsistence requirements exist for the men. Another study also showed that societies which maximize sex distinctions will not have institutionalized male transvestism; whereas societies which make minimal use of sex as a discriminating factor in prescribing behaviour and membership will have institutionalized male transvestism. R.L. and R.Munroe, 'Male transvestism and subsistence economy', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 1977, vol. 103, p. 307; and R.L.Munroe, J.Whiting and D.Hally, 'Institutionalized male transvestism and sex distinctions', *American Anthropologist*, 1969, vol. 71, p. 88.
- 15 T.de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 2–3.
- 16 J.Money and A.Ehrhardt, *A Man Woman/Boy Girl: Differentiation and Dimorphism of Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.
- 17 T.Castle, 'The culture of travesty: sexuality and masquerade in eighteenth-century England', in G.S.Rousseau and R.Porter (eds), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- 18 L.Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 220.
- 19 'Woman is the ruin of representation', Montrelay declared in 'Inquiry into femininity', *m/f*, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 83–101.
- 20 Quoted in A.Solomon-Godeau, 'The legs of the countess', *October*, Winter 1986, vol. 39, p. 81.
- 21 N.Elias, *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners*, New York, Urizen Books, 1970, p. 112; J.Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class. A Study in Comparative Sociology*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 31; S.Mennell, *All Manner of Food. Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 13–15.
- 22 R.Serian, 'Big hair and new makeup. Drag and gay identity', *Whole Earth*, Autumn 1987, p. 6. It is interesting that when the notion of masquerade is applied to the masculine identity, it is assumed that the disguised individual, in playing another being, will turn into that being. H.Brod, 'Masculinity as masquerade', in A.Perchuk and H.Posner (eds), *The Masculine Masquerade. Masculinity and Representation*, Cambridge, MA, MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1995, pp. 16–17.
- 23 R.C.Morris, 'All made up: performance theory and the new anthropology of sex and gender', *American Review of Anthropology*, 1995, vol. 24, p. 583.
- 24 J.Huizinga, *Homo ludens. A Study of the Play-element in Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, p. 13.
- 25 K.Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw. On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 147.
- 26 J.Butler, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York, Routledge, 1993.
- 27 J.Dolan, 'Gender impersonation on stage: destroying or maintaining the mirror of gender roles', *Women & Performance*, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 7–9.

- 28 M.Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1960, p. 371.
- 29 M.Garber, *Vested Interests. Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. 11–13, 40.
- 30 K.Kinski, *Kinski Uncut. The Autobiography of Klaus Kinski*, trans. J.Neugroschel, New York, Viking, 1996, pp. 85–7, 92, 315. Although Kinski boasts of his successes with women, in the postwar period he was closely connected with the homosexual Berlin salon of Prince Alexander Kropotkin. See B-U. Hergemöller, *Mann für Mann. Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte von Freundschaft und Mannmännlicher Sexualität im deutschen Sprachraum*, Hamburg, Mannerschwarmskript, 1998, p. 420.
- 31 A.Kiernander, “‘Theatre without the stink of art,’” an interview with Neil Bartlett’, *GLQ*, 1994, vol. 1, p. 228.
- 32 M.Novy, ‘Shakespeare’s female characters as actors and audience’, in C.R.S.Lenz, G.Greene and C.T.Neely (eds), *The Woman’s Part. Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 264–6.
- 33 *School of Abuses*, quoted in M.Twy cross, ‘Transvestism in the mystery plays’, *Medieval English Theatre*, 1983, vol. 5, p.138.
- 34 *Over-throw of Stage Plays*, 1599, quoted in J.Dollimore, ‘Subjectivity, sexuality, and transgression: the Jacobean connection’, *Renaissance Drama*, 1986, vol.17, p. 63.
- 35 From a letter (2 May 1572) to Carlo Borromeo from a father in Piacenza whose only son had joined a troupe of players; quoted in F.Taviani, *La Commedia dell’ arte e la società barocca: la fascinazione del teatro*, Rome, Mario Bulzoni, 1969, pp. 20–1. My thanks to Fr.Michael Zampelli who drew my attention to this quotation.
- 36 C.Macleod, ‘Pedagogy and androgyny in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 1993, vol. 108, p. 392.
- 37 J.W.von Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Munich, Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977, vol. 11, pp. 533–67.
- 38 J.Kott, *Theatre Notebooks 1947–1967*, trans. B.Tabori, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1968, p. 268.
- 39 ‘The “third” is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis. ‘Garber, op. cit., p. 11.
- 40 Quoted in M.Abley, ‘In two spirits’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 May 1999, p. 7. See W.Roscoe, *Changing Ones. Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America*, London, Macmillan, 1998.
- 41 The most sympathetic and imaginative study of midtown drag shows is H.Falk, *Transvestie. Zeichnungen, Gouachen und Collagen. Der silberne Cocon. Notizen zur Transvestiten-Szene in New York 1979–1985*, Zurich, ABC Verlag, 1985, esp. pp. 11–57.

Part I

Acting out

Chapter one

The sham in shaman

I reacted against my religious upbringing by building altars to all the pagan Gods in the woods: one for Jupiter, one for Isis and so on. I would wear one of my Granny Calah's old frocks, put one arm through the side zip and then put part of the frock over one shoulder and wear it as a toga.

Jayne (Wayne) County¹

The magic show

For the poor boy who would become the punk-rock singer Wayne County and then the transsexual Jayne County, one way of challenging the Christian fundamentalism of the American South was by erecting altars of moss-covered stones to a pantheon of pre-Christian deities and burying beneath them tributes of mummified birds and beasts. Atavism or perhaps a surfeit of gladiator movies made him feel the need to don 'singing robes' to carry out these maimed rites. Granny's frock was pressed into service as the magical garment enabling him to elude the humdrum. Intuitively, he was repeating a long-established cycle of rituals which permitted the evasion of the responsibilities and repressions of manhood. Had County been born into a religion whose divinely sanctioned transvestism offered meaning and shelter to his homosexual tendencies, the rupture between his desires and his duties might have been healed.

The very act of assuming a persona other than one's own is bound to provoke a disruption or defiance of the 'normal' state of things: shape-changing is magical by definition, but gender-changing is exceptionally potent. If one's society admits a 'third' or intermediate sex as part of the natural order, the magical element may seem weaker than in societies where gender-switching between binaries is characterized as transgressive and subversive. In the Judaeo-Christian system, which establishes 'male' and 'female' as unique and complementary categories, each defined in relation to the other, behaviour which confuses these categories is seen to erode not merely social but human boundaries, to dissolve the line between humans and animals. (Hence the confusion in early legal definitions of 'sodomy' and 'bestiality'.) The regularly quoted injunction from Deuteronomy 22:5, 'No woman shall wear an article of man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's dress; for those who do these things are abominable to the Lord your God' categorically excludes magical gender impersonation as a means of conversing with God. Burning bushes, yes; flaming queens, no.²

Cultures at the other extreme endorse the cultic status of the shaman who switches gender to communicate with the divine. Called 'a shibboleth of postmodernism',³ the shaman enjoys such prestige in contemporary academic discourse that almost any template can be laid on the concept. The Romanian

scholar of religion Mircea Eliade interpreted the shaman as a primitive religious mystic, a remote ancestor of St John of the Cross, while anthropologists of the Lévi-Strauss school connect the shaman with the psychotherapist who tends the mental health of his suppliants. For Roland Barthes, the shaman is an archaic narrator whose performance mediates between some external genius and his audience without partaking of that genius himself. This sudden ubiquity of a once obscure figure has entailed some backlash from critics who fear that, in our inability to engage with the differentness of the past, 'the primitive becomes a *tabula rasa* on which we inscribe what we want to hear from our ancestral voices'.⁴

Enjoying celebrity status in the realm of palaeomysticism, the shaman has been cited as a natural paradigm of the showbiz star, whose hysteriogenic charisma resembles the tribal magician's arts of possession and hallucination. The names of David Bowie, Michael Jackson and Madonna have been invoked, since an androgynous attraction strengthens the analogy. Nor are the celebrities averse to accepting the appellation: Liberace 'often suggested that he enjoyed special spiritual grace, and some fans concluded he had faith-healing powers'.⁵ The shaman's conflation with the actor, particularly an actor of exceptional allure credited with both magical abilities and sexual heterodoxy, has the most archaic origins.

Pulling the switch

Shamanism is an art of transformation, which aims to fashion the shaman's person into a medium for his theogogic activity.⁶ This may involve transfiguration into a heightened self or a total identification with what lies opposite or beyond.

Originating in hunting communities, the prehistoric shaman was possessed exclusively by the spirits of animals. Obviously, the transformation of a man into a woman has more cultural reverberations and psychic resonance than the metamorphosis of a man into a stag. To a modern mind, the latter may seem the more extreme, a leap from one species to another; but given the taboo-laden gender differentiations in most tribal societies, the former is the more dangerous metamorphosis. Sexual behaviour and symbology become reversed to extend the ritual androgyny found in socially sanctioned occasional ceremonies; physiology is bent to achieve spiritual or mystic being. Supernatural protection renders transformed shamans exceptionally threatening and, when public opinion does oppose them, protest remains unspoken. They are reputed to be exceptionally adept at their profession, and the untransformed avoid contests with them.

Whereas the transformation into a beast is merely temporary, the total transvestism into another sex may last a lifetime and be integrated into the everyday life of the community.⁷ The reasons for a shaman turning into a woman, a shamaness into a man, are manifold: possession by a spirit or the spirit's search for a mate, the need to communicate with a divinity of the opposite sex, the desire to assume certain attributes associated with one's sexual antithesis. Among the Pelew islanders, the phenomenon of men dressing and behaving like women for life was believed to occur when a female spirit chose a man as her inspired mouthpiece. In a number of cases, the shamanic sex-change occurs in order to merge with an androgynous divinity: for the Sioux it is the moon, for the Altai a Supreme Being referred to as 'mother and father of man'. Among the Araucanians of the Southern Andes, sex-changing shamans are taken to be manifestations of a bisexual supreme deity and are spoken of as 'rey chau' (King Father) and 'rey kushe' (Old Queen, Mother), as well as 'young man Nenechen' or 'old king on high' and 'young woman Nenechen' and 'old queen on high', depending on which divinity is presiding.⁸ Here genitality and gender are not only independent of each other, but may shift constantly depending on the performative, i.e. the social and political, context of the body.⁹

In Siberia, even in non-transformational cases, shamans are considered as belonging neither to the class of males nor females, but to a third class, i.e. shamans.¹⁰ Occasionally the shaman seems born to the

vocation, in the case of an hermaphrodite, or qualified for it, in the case of a child who plays with objects associated with the opposite sex. But early explorers and even modern anthropologists got the sequence wrong: they usually assumed that these individuals, who were in the outside observer's view 'abnormal', were forced into the shamanistic role, segregating them from their community.¹¹ In fact, the concept of androgynous shaman eludes categories of psychological or social deviancy, and endorses the integral value of these extraordinary cases to their communities. Sexual and social role-playing do not always appear together in shamanic transvestism; but in adapting the gender-specific roles of the opposite, the shaman takes members of the community as models and identifies more strongly with them over time.

Transvestitic shamanism may involve a heightening of the shaman's own personality, which is oriented to a pro to typically conceived being from the Other Side. But in electing shamans, supernatural co-optation is more important than private predilection, and marriages between man and man, woman and woman are performed for societal, not personal reasons. Community recognition of the shamans' supernatural powers exempts them from the usual restrictions; they are, in fact, enjoined to behave differently. Intimate relations between the shamans and their same-sex mates are therefore regarded as wholly normal, and may be celebrated with the usual nuptial ceremonies.

'The woman is by nature a shaman', one Chukchee male adept is recorded as saying, and shamanesses seemed to receive the gift more often than men. In Palaeo-Siberian cultures, the signs for 'goddess' and for 'shamaness' are close enough to suggest a primal worship of an earth mother, officiated by women. Among the Tajiks and Uzbeks of Tashkent and Kazakhstan, as a rule shamans are women, believed to have sexual intercourse with a patron spirit of the opposite sex.¹² Given the lowly social status of women among these peoples, the very fact that their personal abilities constituted the decisive factor in their election to the shamanistic vocation suggests that this was equal opportunity possession.¹³

With some exceptions, the male shaman customarily has recourse to the semiotic trappings of female social and sexual role relations. Whole classes of male shamans in the Chinese-Tibetan borderland of Tsinghai and in Korea dress as women. Within the well-documented Siberian tribal traditions, the male-to-female sex-change was in most cases a mere change of apparel, transvestism rather than transsexualism. It could involve something as simple as braiding one's hair like a woman (a device used by the ill to fool spirits) or donning a woman's dress: among the Yakuts, little metal imitations of women's breasts and girls' jackets, and among the Samoyeds, women's hats are the usual tokens. One famous Buryat shaman always put on women's clothes when he performed songs dealing with the fate of women, in other words, to get in the mood, a practice later associated by Aristophanes with the tragic poet Agathon (see [Chapter 2](#)).¹⁴

Even when the outward signs are skin-deep, the psychic rift is traumatic. Whatever the subject's private desires, the spirit-driven imperative to change sex is usually manifested at a critical stage in puberty; the onset is dreaded by young adepts, many of whom prefer death. At the behest of his special deity, a Siberian youth has to relinquish his accustomed gender, adopt women's clothes and let his hair grow. Occasionally the transformed men retain their masculine names, along with their male strength and form, but often the sex-change progresses to a deeper level: the rifle and the harpoon are discarded and the needle and the skin-scrapers are taken up, words are pronounced in a feminine manner, and a female softness of the body is cultivated. Sometimes, under spirit influence, male shamans believe they are or pretend to be pregnant. (There are Yakut legends of men bearing children, but this is primarily an expression of the spirit's thaumaturgical prowess.)¹⁵ While the male shaman must heed male taboos, he also enjoys female privileges such as access to the house of lying-in women for the first three days after birth.

In extreme cases, the 'soft man' seeks a male lover and marries. Anyone identified as a 'soft man' is supposed to have a special protector among the 'spirits' who plays the part of a supernatural husband who is

de facto head of the household and communicates his orders through his 'transformed' wife. The human husband then has to execute these orders faithfully, or else.

Cases of Siberian women transformed into men are recorded more rarely. One transformed shamaness was a widow with children who, at the spirits' command, cropped her hair, adopted male dress and pronunciation, and soon became expert at wielding spear and rifle. She eventually married a young girl eager to become her wife and employed the gastronemius of a reindeer leg as a phallus. A European observer described the face of one powerful and moustachioed shamaness as 'something like a female tragic mask fitted to the body of a giantess of a race different from our own'. Within their special class, their own taboos obtain; so the shamaness, superior to an ordinary woman, is not restricted by specifically female taboos.¹⁶

Medium cool

A Koryak shaman from Kamenskoe wore women's clothes for two years at the spirits' behest, but as he could not attain a complete transformation to his satisfaction he implored the spirits to let him resume men's attire. His request was granted, with the proviso that he resume women's clothes during his shamanistic ceremonies.¹⁷ This was an admission on the spirits' part that, under given circumstances, simulated gender could be as magically effective as a full transformation. This opens the question, then, of performance rather than performativity in shamanic ceremonial.

The *pièce de résistance* of any shamanic healing performance is the dramatic invocation of spirits, both good and evil, for diagnosis and advice about treatment, which leads to the shaman's possession by or battle with the spirits through ecstasy and frenzy. It is a supreme example of dramatic impersonation with elaborate use of voice, dialogue and pantomime. The disease demons are conjured up, then driven away, often by sucking out, sleight of hand and a display of disease objects; the patient's soul is then lured back home. Such a performance may require stage-hands and active participation by the patient and onlookers. Theatricality heightens the emotional quality of the shamanic séance and lends considerable support to its psychotherapeutic efficacy. Non-believers might assume that the séance is faked and the shaman produces the voices heard, but most of the audience have complete belief in its effectiveness.¹⁸

Given the high degree of danger and stress involved in a shamanic transformation, it is not surprising that the shaman may, like a skilful chef, find short-cuts and substitute ingredients to achieve his effects. Sometimes he employs the most rudimentary kinds of acting: if the Inuit shaman wants to suggest turning into a wolf, he sticks two fangs in his upper lip, creating a prototype of a mask, and utters a ventriloquial wolf noise. If he turns into a muskox, he briefly leaves the igloo and returns with his torso clad in its skin. The theatre historian Carl Niessen named such shamans the 'Eskimo national drama', privileged actors whose spirit dialogues, celebratory songs and competitions comprised a complete entertainment. All sorts of variety acts, including ventriloquy and word-swallowing, play a part; mimicry is a regular feature of an animistic religion whose devotees would expect such a display. The ceremonies of healing and oracles, the spirit-wrestling and mime resembled modern spiritualist séances, kitted out with dimmed lamps and closed eyes, to provide a 'thrilling radio play with lots of noises off from the attendant spirits and hostile powers'.¹⁹

Wherever shamans compete, they may strive to detect and expose the jugglery of their rivals or outdo them at their own game.²⁰ The earliest European observers of shamans, informed as they were by Enlightenment scepticism and a Voltairean distrust of priests, were quick to label such demonstrations as hoaxes. Johann Georg Gmelin in his 1751 account of a decade's travel through Siberia revelled in exposing the prestidigitation and trickwork in the ceremonies. He even cast aspersions on the technique, remarking



Figure 1 An adolescent effeminated shaman of the Koryak tribe with spirit-summoning drum. From W.Jochelson, *The Koryak* (Leiden and New York, 1905–8) (F.Karsch-Hack, *Der Gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker*, Munich, Ernst Reinhardt, 1911).

that the shamans got so carried away that their movements seemed to consist of ‘displays of the body, such as our possessed are fond of making’.²¹ This alien gaze could not see past the prestidigitation and paraphernalia of the performance element.

Researchers often noted that when there were long intervals between séances, the ‘congregation’ began to feel uneasy. The shaman’s uncanny presence in their community seemed in such instances to lack justification. Under pressure to ‘come across’ even when inspiration flags, the shaman might learn to replicate the trance state by a ‘performance’ or ‘re-enactment’ which the community recognized as such, while acknowledging that the performance trailed clouds of the original glory. Traces of the divine afflatus were present in the simulation, for at all times the shaman was a *professional*. The greater the urge to compete or discredit, the larger the quantum of contrivance. Only at the point when the performance became wholly divorced from ecstatic possession and from a teleology of community service did the shaman evolve from professional medium into professional actor.

The problem for the shaman was in sustaining the exalted pitch of possession. The vertiginous states which often culminate in religious rituals have as their goal, in Roger Caillois' words,

to destroy for a moment the stability of perception and to inflict on the lucid consciousness a sort of voluptuous panic. In all cases, it is a matter of acceding to a sort of spasm of trance or stupefaction which obliterates reality with a peremptory suddenness.²²

Ecstasy is achieved through corporeal excitements: the body dances, the senses are assailed and inebriated, genital erethism, sustained by drugs and other stimulants, is brought to orgy pitch. The ultimate aim is to attain an alterity, an imitation of the cosmogonic myth. Most cultures, however, engage whole portions of the community in the ceremony: mutual effort efficiently attains mass hysteria or hypnosis.

To enable his community to partake of such a state, the shaman is obliged to enter trance on his own, abetted by certain external aids. The stamina required is considerable. In the Balinese exorcism drama, the *Barong*, the operatic presentation lasts from midnight until dawn, accompanied by music by a full orchestra and a fireworks climax when the hideous old witch Rangda appears, shrieking and bellowing. Very often the actor playing Rangda falls into a trance and temporarily goes mad. Rangda must always be played by a man, for only a ritually powerful male can withstand the dangers of wearing such a magically potent mask. Jane Belo's work on trance in Bali offers a classic account of one such trance spokesman for the masked figure of the *Barong*: Ketoet Roereng, the only *sadeg* permitted to assume the role of the female deity in his Javanese village. In ordinary life, he was non-effeminate, strongly built, with a black moustache and a swaggering gait. In trance he cried out and wept in a woman's voice and sat with his legs beneath him like a woman: for he had been entered by the Ratoe Ajoe, a goddess of the *Barong*. Even when the performer is capable of remaining outside the trance state, the danger persists. One tall man had the strength to play Rangda without falling into a trance; but members of his audience dropped right and left. Face to face with his mask, they did not dare to stab him and so stabbed themselves in their fits.²³

An essay by Dwight Conquergood on the transformational dynamics of contemporary Vietnamese shamanism describes sessions in which the shaman, enacting his patient's ailment, recapitulates the initiatory bout of illness through which all shamans derive their healing power. He impersonates Shee Yee, the most powerful archetype of magician, who, transformed into a beautiful girl, flirts with evil spirits, disarms and destroys them. The female beauty is only one of an armoury of guises but it is the one which, because it entails a sex-change, is most closely related to the shaman's empowerment and triumph. It reveals transformation to be the *élan vital* of the performance.²⁴ The succession of 'masks' makes the shaman highly vulnerable, especially in the cooling-down phase, where he has to re-enter his own person and abandon the potent spirit identities. After all, the shaman is himself 'unwell' and, as a double of the patient, needs time to recover from a perilous fever.

Whether the shaman, in compounding physiological experience with spiritual essence, uses naïve means, spontaneous aberrations or a degradation of mystical techniques, this, in Eliade's opinion, makes no difference. Rather than the means it is the end; the transformation of the human being into something higher must be kept in sight. 'Uniting the opposites in the concrete arrives at a method of being neither human nor superhuman.'²⁵ This halfway stage between human and divine might be termed theatrical.

This conclusion can also be drawn from a study of Colombian shamans by Michael Taussig. He points out that the everyday public intimacy between the shaman and his patients has no less therapeutic value than the hallucinogenic rites that the shaman uses to weave together the mundane and the extraordinary. This bringing together of different spheres creates an imagery essential to the articulation of implicit social

knowledge: the shaman's songs, the patient's explanations, the bawdy jokes, the leaden pauses, the catharsis, produce an interplay of otherness, a dialectic of the imagination.

In their coming together, bringing misfortune to a head, healer and patient articulate distinct 'moments' of knowing such as the noumenal with the phenomenal and do so in a socially active and reactive process that also connects quite distinct forces of flux and steadiness, humor and despair, uncertainty and certainty.²⁶

The visionary shaman lends his belief in the impossible, the earth-bound patient joins in, voicing hesitancy; in this synthetic dialogue, the patient may try to rise, sing and dance in tune with the shaman's vision, but fails. Each has a special viewpoint and function in this extemporaneous acting out of the imaginative infrastructure of society.

This strikes me as a primeval model for the fundamental relationship between an actor and his audience: the performer attempts to transmit a heightened vision of both the experienced and what Aristotle calls 'the probable impossible' to a receptor who may be sceptical or inapt, but who makes an effort to believe in what he is presented. The interaction of the two perceptions during the theatrical event contributes both to its social significance and its aesthetic uniqueness.

How the shaman became a drag queen

In transcending the profane state and achieving union with the supernatural, ecstatic bisexuality was a valuable means, but it might also be an end in itself. In his study of Angolan cults, S.Frazão describes the androgynous dances of the Mila Mila society, meant to cure supernaturally caused obsession and depression. After an animal sacrifice, blood-drinking, a wild tarantella and the touching of the dancers' tongues with a cobra's tooth, the dancers are possessed by the spirits. Months may go by before the possession wears off: in the meantime, women behave like men, taking one or more wives, and men dress like women and live with youths. No one can refuse to mate with the possessed lest they offend the spirits; but afterwards, they claim not to remember what took place during the time of possession.²⁷ This was a tribe in which homosexual practices were otherwise absent, and one might cynically suggest that the excuse of possession sounds like the frat brother's 'Boy, was I drunk' after indulging in a little mutual masturbation. Otherwise repressed desires and socially dangerous urges become sanctioned because they are coerced by a demonic force.

The violent possession of the Mila Mila may seem an excessive and roundabout way of licensing same-sex activity. If its authenticity came into question, the cult members might find themselves labelled not as ecstasies but as deviants. This, however, is precisely what occurred in developed societies in the Western hemisphere, as the shaman's substitution of tried-and-true simulacra for genuine inspiration affected the gender transformation. Historically, shamanic sex-change in non-European societies lost its religious prestige only after an alien culture colonized and demonized it. Both Christianity and rationalism, distrustful of the shaman's claims of shape-changing, a practice not easily subject to social control, exiled the spirit medium to the periphery of religion as a sorcerer.²⁸ Moreover, organized religions wrested away the priestly function from women and conferred it exclusively on men, so that even so female an art as divination had to be mediated by a cross-dressed male.

In Scandinavian mythology, Loki, the god of fire, was charged with being an *ergi*, a priest-magician who wore a medley of female and sacerdotal garments (possibly the feathered cloak of Freyja) in order to become the goddess herself or one of the animals sacred to her. Such an accusation implied passive sodomy

and was generally aimed at men who dared to practise *seidr*, a divinatory art which ancient tradition reserved exclusively for women. Since women were assumed to be inferior, it was logical that a man who tried to usurp a woman's role would lose caste and be tarred with feminine characteristics. The defamatory identification of an *ergi* with a sexual pathic was a response to the incursion of men into an exclusively feminine sphere of competence, an incursion opposed by the collective conscience which repelled it as absolutely unjustifiable.²⁹ The first to oppose it were women, for the Germanic religions had reserved all important sacerdotal functions for them. Once men began to practice *seidr*, women risked the loss of one of the few prestigious offices invested in them by their society.

The upshot was that the male priest was in danger of being redefined by his society as a woman: after all, anyone regularly penetrated by the spirit might be apt for sexual penetration as well. (Christian priests bound love-knots with their Saviour, a practice viewed by converts as a form of shamanic possession.) The primitive idea that close association with women would contaminate a man, imbuing him with such 'feminine' qualities as physical frailty, also played its part. The fear of the transvestite magician was compounded with an ingrained misogyny to create an aversion to the effeminate male that eventuates in the 'homophobia' of modern society.

In the long history of sacral prostitution, whereby devotees come into contact with the divinity embodied by the priest or shaman, a once exclusively female domain was quickly infiltrated by male pretenders. The pre-Confucian Chinese *wu* or female shamanic exorcists who engaged in sex with their suppliants were quickly joined by male transvestites. The male transvestite *basir* of Borneo are priest-mediums who serve sexually as women; their prestige is based on the quality of their performance. The same is true of the *bisu* of Southern Sulawesi who wear women's attire during rituals and behave as homosexuals in everyday life.³⁰

The *baptai*, priests who served Kotys or Cotytto, the goddess of a Thracian mystery cult which enjoyed a great revival in the Hellenistic period, officiated in drag, showing a penchant for blond wigs. Cotytto is sometimes identified with the *magna mater* Cybele, who drives her worshipper to emasculate himself in his madness, 'repeating the same hieratic symbolism of the shamanistic attempt at achieving neuter being'.³¹ In the late Roman Republic, the Galli, devotees of Cybele, and the Metragyrtai, cultists of the *dea Syria* Atargatis, also castrated themselves in their frenzy, donned female garb, and revelled in passive sodomy. Beyond genuine piety, service to the goddess was probably an attractive proposition for youths who were already inclined to be *cinaedi* or 'effeminates', seeking opportunities to be buggered. Religious possession was a convenient cover for acts which were considered degrading for free adult males. *Gallus* became a convenient term of abuse for anyone suspected of being a pathic, and *cinaedi* a generic name for male dancers who wore women's clothes.³²

Ritual musicians renowned for their virtuosity at the flute and drum, the original *baptai*, had, by the time of Christ, been reduced to itinerant bands of transvestites, strictly on the game. The condemned social status of such troupes stands in sharp contrast to the esteem and the clearly defined social role in the normative group enjoyed by transvestitic shamans in their heyday. The *baptai* earned a living as mountebank-whores, staging fake miracles and selling their bodies as passive partners in same-sex relations. If any religious impulse survived in this, it was a mere vestige of an obsolete cult of an ancient female divinity. Female cult servants had long since disappeared, and the cross-dressing of cult servitors had lost its devotional meaning. The *baptai's* feigned possession was mere charlatanism, and the accompanying staccato utterances ventriloquy. Nevertheless, feigning possession with a total reliance on technique rather than supernatural inspiration opens it up to shaping by imagination and artistic creativity.

The more remote these troupes grew from their original religious rationale, the more the female role assumed by the men in them became caricatured and socially repudiated. Group sex and promiscuity

replaced marriage and family, and the once-sacred institution was indelibly profaned by an inordinate emphasis on the sexual component. In highly developed cultures, which relegate possession cults and shamanism to the fringes of religious observance and there chiefly among the disenfranchised, the position of transvestites is diametrically opposed to the prevalent ideal of maleness. Non-shamans dressing as the opposite sex cannot be sheltered by the excuse of spirit possession. They receive no social validation. Even if the ancient cultic meaning persists in the folk memory of the masses, and out of curiosity, nostalgia or superstition a modicum of sympathy abides, public opinion fails to discern any tinge of holiness in homosexual activity performed by cross-dressed mountebanks. It is regarded as unadulterated proof of debauchery. Even when this kind of transvestite behaviour preserves vestigial simulations of such features of possession as erotically charged dancing, it can be accounted for more easily by exogenous factors in modern mores.³³

A transitional phase in which the transvestitic shaman has evolved into a mountebank-male whose without entirely forfeiting his cultic connections has contemporary analogues. The complicated interplay of shamanic religion, female impersonation, homosexual activity and professional entertainment can still be observed in the hijras of India and the *pais de santos* of Brazil.³⁴

Holy whores

Hijras, devotees of the mother goddess Bahuchara Mata, are men who live as women; many but not all are castrated, most voluntarily (though this is in dispute); a very few are hermaphrodites. Their numbers throughout the Indian sub-continent are estimated at between 50,000 and a million. They have been described as 'Volatile, vulgar and...violent', and are considered by the police and society in general to be simply an abusive caste of prostitutes who come unbidden to weddings and natal celebrations.³⁵ Singing, dancing and cracking bawdy jokes, they mulct pennies from the poor by supposedly imparting fertility through their blessings, and larger sums from the rich and prurient by threatening to strip naked before they will leave.

'What makes hijras hijras is not biology or anatomy but culture', declares the editor of *India Currents*, Arvind Kumar.³⁶ They are not common- or garden-variety transvestites (*ihonda*), men who may don or doff female garb as they choose, who may marry and have children, be sexually active or impotent. Neither are they *jhankas*, males with intact genitalia who also sing and dance at weddings and birth ceremonies and often wear false breasts. Nor are they straightforward eunuchs ('no-penis' in the Hindu view), for they claim a 'female penis', cut short, a sort of male clitoris. Hijras speak of themselves as 'separate' beings, neither man nor woman, 'born as men, but not men', 'not perfect men'; because they cannot bear children, which is considered necessary to perfect human nature. As is usual in Indian culture, a compromise evolved: to give birth to an hermaphrodite is the worst curse that can befall a woman, yet the blessing of a hijra is regarded as unusually potent, capable of scaring off ghosts. Hijras are jeered at and pelted in the streets, but their absence at certain domestic or public ceremonies would invalidate the whole proceeding.³⁷

In principle, no one can 'become' a hijra, and only God can 'create' hijras. Despite this fact, there are more castrated hijras than hermaphroditic ones. Ejected from their homes, rejected by their families, they form veritable guilds or protective societies. Their female attire is essential to their performance, their begging and their visits to the temple of the goddess Bahuchara (though they must wear men's clothes in mosques). They are forbidden to cut their hair or shave, but pluck out their whiskers; they walk, sit and stand like women, and carry pots on their undulating hips, though they may engage in male occupations. They adopt female kinship names and occasionally female idioms and intonations; they use women's seating on public transport and demand to be counted as females in the census.

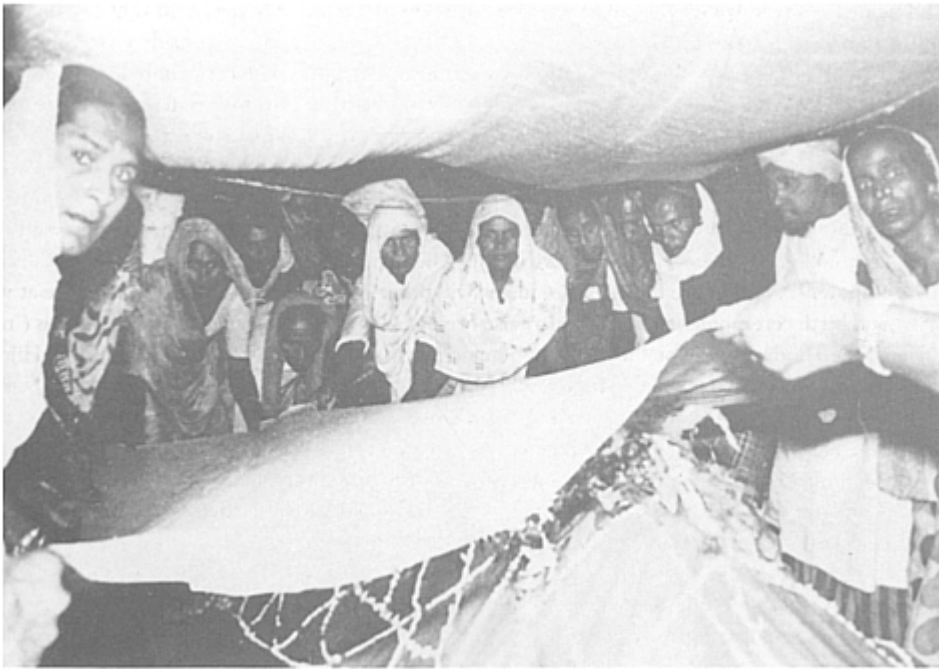


Figure 2 The hijra Amina Begum and members of her community laying a veil on the tomb of a Muslim saint in Basumati. Unattributed photograph from G.Busquet and C.Beaune, *Les Hermaphrodites* (Paris, 1978).

But, not officially ranked as women, they make no serious effort to pass as women. Although in the eighteenth century they were made to supplement their female clothing with a man's turban to warn the unwary, it would take a serious astigmatism to mistake their gender today. Their male voices, patently false breasts, painted cheeks and scarlet lipstick, diamond-studded noses, heavy chignons or bouffant hair-dos and nautch-girl outfits are caricatures, their mannerisms burlesque. The blatant sexual overtones of their coarse, coaxing, abusive speech and gestures are the polar opposite of the demure restraint required of Hindu femininity. To remind the onlooker of their status, they let their beards grow for a few days or display their hairy muscular arms and mutilated genitals.³⁸ In the opinion of Serena Nanda, who has studied them closely, their status as eunuchs make them man minus maleness, but their attire and behaviour makes them man plus woman.

In no small degree, their role in culture is, as the ethnologist Opler suggested, as performers. In their female costumes, they take part not only in domestic ceremonies, but in variety shows and stage plays, singing folk-songs and hits from 'Bollywood' movies. One contemporary Pakistani hijra claims that 'most of our earnings are spent on make-up and clothes' for performances which provide the bulk of his income. Some work in films as extras. Significantly, despite the considerable activity of hijras as prostitutes, who may join the community to satisfy sexual desires,³⁹ they are not categorized as passive homosexuals like pathic effeminate males in Northern India who are known as *zenanas* or women (men who take the insertor role are not distinguished linguistically or sociologically). Hijras play no part in the clandestine homosexual subcultures in the big cities, and yet the caste attracts all sorts of cross-gendered identities and behaviours, from born hermaphrodites to transsexuals. Perhaps 'queer' is the proper denomination.

Hijras may make a living as castrated hustlers, but they are also sanctified hierophants who have mythically renounced sexuality and gender. The hijras choose to identify with a goddess or the wife of a male divinity. This legitimates their function as ritual performers and shapes their generally positive self-definition.⁴⁰ Shiva, at once ascetic and phallus, the man/woman *Ardhanarisvara*, wielder of the female creative power *shakti*, is a particular favourite. (A much-quoted aphorism runs, ‘without *shakti* Shiva is *shava*, a corpse.’) In Southern India, hijras like to associate with Vishnu in his incarnation as Mohini, the most beautiful woman in the world, by whom Shiva conceived a child. Thousands of hijras ritually identify themselves as the female avatar of Krishna by marrying the deity Koothandavar in a Tamil ceremony. A day later, when he is buried, they beat their breasts and mourn.

It is not uncommon in esoteric Hindu rituals for a male to cross-dress and imitate female behaviour in order to worship female deities or to realize the woman in himself. In the worship of Randa, the beloved of Vishnu, the male devotees simulate menstruation, have sex with men and may even castrate themselves—a modern equivalent of the priests of Cybele. For those who wish to avoid such extremes, the worship of the bloodthirsty Devi is fraught with peril, for unless the male devotee is seen as her female servant, he is in danger of being castrated as her lover. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty calls this a ‘no-win’ situation for the devout Hindu male: he must become female to unite with the male god, but also to avoid uniting with the female god.⁴¹ Dame if you do, dame if you don’t.

Throughout Hindu religion, androgynes, gender impersonators and sex-changes are multifarious tokens of its ability to accommodate ambiguities; the dyad man/woman is deeply ingrained in the popular culture not as a binary but as an amalgam. In the Tantric school, the Supreme Being is conceived of as an integral sex containing both male and female genitals; so hermaphroditism is an ideal state. To achieve salvation by transcending one’s gender, transvestism serves as a useful aid. The Baba Bhagvan Ram, leader of a modern Tantric sect, assumed an androgynous character despite his uncompromisingly masculine physique; as the incarnation of Shiva’s *shakti* and more particularly of his consort Sarveshvari, Ram is pictured in an ashram he founded as a goddess with swollen breasts and is said to appear to his followers in a sari.⁴²

Hijras are largely an urban phenomenon. In the villages, their counterparts are the *jōgappa* or female men, otherwise normal bachelors who are wed to ‘Jamadagni’, the husband of the goddess Yellamma, whom they serve. Uncastrated and unprostituted, flaunting a lusty sexuality while living as idealized females, they hedge homosexual practices, so *verboten* a subject that there is no word for it in the vernacular, with a taboo-tinged holiness.⁴³

This slippage between secular revulsion and reverential awe, between identification with the godhead and unbridled (homo)sexual excess signalled by the transvestite, is a major feature of Caribbean religions. Many creeds originating in West African traditions, such as the Hausa *bori* cult, harbour homosexual spirits: in Haitian *voudoun*, certain priests are *masisi* (sissies) and peasants sing a hymn to them even as they gesture lewdly.⁴⁴ As early as the sixteenth century, sexually passive males in Central Africa were known as *jin bandaa* or ‘medicine men’, to advertise their power as spirit mediums; the feminization, which rendered them vulnerable to spirit possession, also defined them primarily as religious leaders. The Portuguese Inquisition found many of these men guilty of both witchcraft and sodomy (a popular linkage), and occasionally exiled them to Northern and Northeastern Brazil, where Yoruba and Bantu spiritual beliefs took tenacious root and intermingled with elements of Catholicism and Kardecism (based on the spiritism of the French medium Alain Kardec).⁴⁵

As usual, the Afro-Brazilian cults of Bahía, *candomblé*, had initially been a female domain, since only women were able to suckle the deities, the *orishas* or *orixás*, themselves sexually ambiguous. If men served this function, it would blaspheme the gods and emasculate the man. However, in the 1920s a new cult arose, the *Candomblé de cabocio*, which added to possession by the *orixás* possession by *caboclos* or Brazilian

Indians. Created by black Brazilians, this sect bestowed dignity and high status on the poor, especially women and homosexuals, the doubly disadvantaged. It did so by providing openings for new cult leaders, most of them males under the age of 45, many in their early twenties, who had not gone through rigorous initiation rites. These *pais de santos* (fathers of saints) also began to be recruited from *bichas* or effeminate hustlers, who ‘solicit on the street in obscene whispers and make themselves conspicuous by mincing with sickening exaggeration, overdoing the falsetto tones and using women’s turns of phrase. All their energies are focused upon arranging the sexual act in which they take the female role.’⁴⁶ They were compatible with the priestly function, since being possessed by a spirit was equated with taking the receptor role in anal sex. By the mid-1980s 80 per cent of the priests were reputed to be homosexual, and at least one priestess in São Paulo was a man, the logical devolution of cross-dressing. Recent research has cast doubt on whether *travestis* (transgendered homosexual prostitutes) are devotees of *candomblé* or of any religion, but the effeminacy of the cult’s male leaders remains unquestioned.⁴⁷

Although some *pais de santos* conceal their sexual preferences, the *bichas* carry on like stereotypical drag queens, adopting pseudonyms, using feminine pronouns, and hunting for ‘real men’ as their partners. The way a man held his cigarette or crossed his legs could lead to accusations of being a *bicha*, not unlike a charge of witchcraft. As among the Siberian shamans, accusations of false trances were levelled in an atmosphere of interpersonal rivalry, and, indeed, some *bichas* who became *pais de santos* to increase trade do pretend to be in trance; the authority of a female spirit gives freer rein to their effeminate penchants: ‘I am so ugly and Doña Mariana [the spirit] is so beautiful.’ Eventually, the cults came to be regarded as exclusive haunts of pederasts, lesbians and prostitutes.

Even though mainstream Brazilian culture regards both male homosexuality and possession cults as deviant and defiling, the despised *bicha*, like the hijra, gained a source of power from his professional involvement with supernatural border-crossing. Within the cult itself, a strict division is made between the individual’s saintly life and his secular private life: no sex is permitted before, during or after the rituals, since persons are considered unclean up to three days after intercourse. Otherwise no restrictions are imposed on an individual’s sexual activities. No one believes that the spirits have a special affinity for *bichas*, but, since the aesthetic aspect of the ritual is important, the *bichas*’ skills at dancing, dressing up and carousing under the influence of a female spirit are highly esteemed. One researcher has recorded a *travesti* adept at *candomblé* paid by other *travestis* to allow her body to be temporarily inhabited by minor female deities, so that they might learn how to attract desirable men.⁴⁸

Shaman to bumboy to actor

Dancing, dressing up and carousing in order to communicate with the godhead brings us back to performance. The identification of the officiating transvestite with the prostitute has much in common with the identification of the actor with the prostitute. The more the religious element is pared away from the transvestitic shaman, the greater the importance given to the sensuality of the disguise, as with the hijra, or to its performance value, as with the *pais de santo*. The sexuality of the liminal ritual—mating dances, fertility rites, ecstatic movement to stimulate erethism—is propelled by an empirical teleology critical to the material or psychological survival of society. The liminoid erotics of theatre involves a more personal exchange of desires.

Strip the religious aura from the functions of homosexual prostitute/ecstatic performer and the performer simply becomes identified as a gender-shifter or homosexual. In some cultures the relegation of gender-liminal individuals to the realm of performance provides them with a social context, a constitutive relationship between structure and agency. By acting out his gender marginality, such an individual

achieves a kind of alternative prestige as a repository of artistic and cultural tradition (and in a modern world of tourism this function has taken on special importance).⁴⁹ Conversely, the segregation of the performing arts to a playground for the gender liminal renders them suspect in more developed societies which have forgotten the vital connection between performance and the ritual bases of its institutions.

That a performer is *per se* effeminate is taken for granted among the Tausug of Sulu, an archipelago in the Southern Philippine Islands. There 'sensitive men' (*bantut*) are relegated to the musical profession, which sanctions female vocal intonations, mannerisms and bodily swaying, especially in a stylized reproduction of the courtship ritual where the *bantut* invariably plays the female role. A similar group of male transvestite dancers, the *dahling-dahling*, travels throughout Southern Sulu, performing at important celebrations. However, since this is an Islamic society in which the cosmological view of 'overt sodomy' is as a drought-inducing heat, the performers, despite close ritualized friendships between men, are not necessarily prostitutes.⁵⁰

These practices are part of a long tradition.⁵¹ From the shores of the Sea of Marmora to the Yangze Kiang, the role of sex object *cum* entertainer invested in the West on young women was until the political and social revolutions following the First World War assumed by boys, known generically as *batcha*. The larger the city and the more sequestered its women, the more widespread was the popularity of these song-and-dance catamites. In cities and among nomads where women were relatively unconfined, *batcha* were few and implicitly condemned by Muslim edict. Ibn-Abbâs warned, 'The Prophet has cursed men who take on feminine attractions and women who take on masculine attractions. Chase them from your house, he said. Expel such a one.'⁵² Nevertheless, the Islamic obsession with female modesty could not allow women to perform. When Abdul Mejid, Sultan of Turkey, built a new palace with a private theatre, pretty pages played leading ladies to equally handsome boys. A Westerner's account of one of the first Arabic plays, Mārūn dal-Naqqāsh's *Abou the Dupe* (*Abū al-Hasan al-Mughaffal*, 1850), points out that there were no women on stage, in the courtyard or even at the windows looking on to the stage; but that the boy dressed to play the heroine acquitted himself 'with perfect success'.⁵³

Rather than expulsion, the *batcha* enjoyed a semi-official position as surrogate odalisques in the Khanates of Central Asia. They were the progeny of poor parents, who, like the Italian peasants who had their sons castrated so that as chapel singers they might provide for their old age, sold them to musicians or the rich to learn their trade. Their buttocks were massaged, their anuses dilated, while addiction to alcohol and hashish, as well as beatings, inured them to the more painful aspects of their calling. The protector was the first to have sex with the *batcha*, who was then turned over to a moneyed keeper. (If he had no official protector his earnings went to middlemen.)

The *batcha*'s career was brief, usually from age 12 to 16, and ended as soon as the first signs of a beard appeared. Thereafter he might become a solid citizen, found a family and keep his own harem and *batcha*; those who had developed a taste for passive pederasty might retain a servant *in praepostera* for his own and his wife's pleasure. Others carried out their effeminization to its logical conclusion by castration; but in so doing they lost their professional standing, or, if they pursued prostitution, would be scorned because they had been performers in their youth. Public singing and dancing were thought to be a more ineradicable debasement than anal penetration.⁵⁴

The *batcha* had no spiritual pretensions. The equation was simply playboy=bumboy. On the other hand, the troupes of Korean strolling players, *namsadang*, halfway between a group of mendicant monks and a village band, are still affiliated to religious beliefs. Outcast, even feared in the aggregate, they descended from the *mujari* or Korean gypsies, famed for exorcists as well as strolling players, prostitutes, butchers and other low-caste employments. They were often associated with Buddhist temples, where they sheltered, and young monks occasionally went about with them collecting alms for their order. The entertainers' alfresco



Figure 3 A *batcha* performing at an all-male feast of the Sarts in Kokand, Tazhikistan. Pre-First World War postcard. From *Bilder-Lexikon Kulturforschung* (Vienna, n.d.).

playing, singing and dancing were seen as parallels to the initiation journeys and pilgrimages of Buddhist legend, much as the Siberian shaman's personal spiritual journey was served up as a symbolic travel narrative for his society.

Boys known as *hwadong* or *hwarang* and dressed attractively, often in girls' clothes, were always part of these troupes. Their preference for female finery might be explained as shamanic, but latter-day *hwarang* were notorious for their same-sex carryings-on. Such conduct in kings was condemned by Confucians, but it was a common failing, teased in the traditional puppet play whose wastrel hero spends some of his money on a pretty boy or *midong*. The term *midong*, regularly applied to wandering musicians, was synonymous with *namch'ang* or boy entertainer. It was taken for granted that these all-male teams kept the boys as catamites; marriages sometimes took place among members of the troupe, and the boys were occasionally prostituted to the public. One modern village band picked a *midong* for his looks and maintained him; he was expected not to work, but to dress daintily and entertain the labourers, a situation which, by the time he had reached his twenties, was beginning to be regarded as undesirable. The *namsadang* never lost their link to shamanism, and as late as the 1960s could be found performing religious ceremonies in the Korean countryside; although male shamans are not common in Korea, the boys continued to play a designated part in the ritual dances.⁵⁵

The identification of the performer with the effeminate was not confined to the Orient. Attic culture portrayed the handsome young musician, especially the cithaera player, as an object of male desire; a popular motif of vase paintings shows Hyacinthus abducted by Zephyrus as he strums his cither. Plato went so far as to say that Orpheus was unable to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld because he acted without resolve, 'as is natural to a cithaera player'.⁵⁶

When Juvenal catalogues lustful Roman matrons who are shameless enough to fall for actors and gladiators, the example he draws from the theatre is of a male mime portraying a mythical woman notorious for her irregular tastes: 'When the effeminate Bathyllus lasciviously dances Leda, just watch the women. Tuccia can't control herself, Apula suddenly moans in drawn-out ecstasy, as though at the climax of passion. Country-girl Thymele's all rapt attention, she's learning fast.'⁵⁷ A womanish actor instructs women in unruly passion by impersonating a legendarily loose woman.

The horoscopes of *cinaedi* or male whores often determined them to become pantomimes, 'who may be considered prostitutes *ex officio*'. The pantomimes and histrions of the Roman Empire were expected to be sexually available, and the emperors Caligula and Trajan were looked down on for taking male stage stars as their bedmates.⁵⁸ Roman disdain for actors had to do not only with their presentation of their bodies on a public stage, but also their professional need to ingratiate themselves, most often through the charms of their person. To enhance one's looks for possibly immoral ends was particularly offensive. Speaking of ordinary society, the second-century physiognomist Polemo warned of personal adornment and clothing 'with which men deck themselves out to please other men and women. Some men pursue boys with these techniques. Others, such as pathics, who have a woman's sexual desire, use their techniques to catch men the way prostitutes do.'⁵⁹ Men who made themselves attractive to seduce other men assume a woman's role; for the actor, this is part and parcel of his profession. He is womanish (and fallen-womanish) the moment he applies any beautifying device. Behaving like a professional actor could lead to charges of unmanly conduct: the extravagant gestures of the orator Hortensius won him the nickname Dionysia, from a celebrated cabaret dancer of the time. Since dancing was a low profession and the name alluded to the proscribed Dionysus, god of loss of self-control, the insult was particularly fanged.⁶⁰

The linkage of actors and pathics was familiar even to the 'barbarians'. In his legendary history of ancient Sweden, Saxo Grammaticus shows the warrior hero Starcatherus (Starkadhr) to be so scandalized during the sacrifice to Freyr by the 'movements of effeminate bodies, the applause the players receive thereby, and the listless tinkling of little bells' that he leaves Sweden. These 'players' were, of course, not actors but transgendered hierophants, *seidr-mans*; but they are nevertheless denigrated in their capacity as performers.⁶¹

The triad of votary—prostitute—performer, so widespread throughout the heathen world, was rejected out of hand by Christianity. The collusion of mysticism and prostitution was inimical to it. Christianity was typically paradoxical, divisive rather than syncretic in its attitude to eunuchs and effeminates. Many Church fathers distrusted eunuchs as a putative third sex, not so much an amalgam but a deficit of the other two. Despite the value the Church invested in chastity (celibacy was viewed as an imitation of the angels) and the mortification of the flesh, it rejected castration as a means to sexual renunciation. The Nicene Council specifically prohibited eunuchs from being ordained to the priesthood. The cases of Origen (and later Abelard) were exceptions, much condemned by their contemporaries.⁶² Consequently, in the Christian worldview, emasculation and its attendant effeminacy were associated not with asceticism or other-worldliness but with lasciviousness and pagan self-indulgence.

Busy extirpating any hint of sexual irregularity from the effeminacy of its priests, the Church just as busily imputed it to the secularized actor. It attacked the theatre as an arena for arousing lust, a temple to heathen gods, and a broadcaster of deceptions; Isidore of Seville declared the theatre and the brothel to be synonymous '*eo quod post ludos exactos, meretrices ibi proternerentur*' ('for after the plays were over, the prostitutes there gave themselves up to the public'). Most fundamental to the anti-theatrical prejudice was the question: if God is the author of truth, how can He approve anything false? The actor's assumption of another identity and cross-dressing as a subset of this practice consequently attract special opprobrium, as in Tertullian's *Cultum feminarum* and Dio Chrysostom's Easter Sermon of 399. 'After all,' said Tertullian, 'if



Figure 4 Relief of an hermaphrodite, believed to be a scene from a pantomime performed by the famous dancer Bathyllus. An Alexandrian slave, he was acclaimed as ‘God of Dance’ for erotic portrayals in both male and female roles. National Museum of Trentino. From A.M. Rabenalt, *Mimus Eroticus* (Hamburg, n.d.).

the divine lord states in his law: Cursed be he who dresses as a woman, what verdict do you think he will render against a pantomime who adopts not only the garments, but also the voice, gestures, and softness of women?⁶³

The forceful prohibition of stage transvestism and the attacks on the morals of the professional player wound up identifying him as a godless cross-dresser. When Isidore of Seville came to define *Histriones* in his *Etymologiae*, he described them as ‘those who in female garb mimicked the goings-on of shameless women; they [masculine pronoun] also acted out tales by dancing’. In other words, for Isidore, performer meant female impersonator and the females impersonated were sexuality incarnate.⁶⁴

To sum up, the shaman’s body is crucial to the spiritual transaction, since it is used as a communicating vessel, a vehicle capable of adapting to whichever gender is required by the spirit. Physical contact with the shaman, as in an act of prostitution, is a vicarious bond with the divine. Cross-dressing abets the visionary process, for when the shaman is at a loss for divine inspiration, he simulates it or attempts to coax it by simulation. The actor is thus a shadow of the shaman, one step further removed from the supernatural, but

still simulating, still using his body as a vehicle for the lay spectator's vicarious inspiration by travelling back and forth across the frontiers of gender and carrying with him fantastic contraband.

Notes

- 1 J.County with R.Smith, *Man Enough to Be a Woman*, London, Serpent's Tail, 1995, p.10.
- 2 It is often pointed out that this injunction had in mind the *kedeshot* or sacred prostitutes attached to the Temple as sacred prostitutes of Ashtoreth or Astarte, a worship introduced by Solomon; Tamar even donned the professional dress of a *kedeshah* to seduce Judah (Genesis xxxviii, 21). See I.Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1907, vol. vii, pp. 462–3.
- 3 G.Flaherty, 'The performing artist as the shaman of higher civilization', *Modern Language Notes*, April 1988, vol. 103, p. 525.
- 4 See H.Nachtigall, 'The culture-historical origin of shamanism' (1952), in A.Bharati (ed.), *The Realm of the Extra-human. Agents and Audiences*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973.
- 5 *Time*, 16 February 1987, p. 82, quoted in Flaherty, op. cit., p. 520. The fullest attempt to draw a straight line between the shaman and the showbiz celebrity is R.P.Taylor, *The Death and Resurrection Show. From Shaman to Superstar*, London, Anthony Blond, 1985, but, curiously, he never discusses cross-dressing.
- 6 P.Schmidt, quoted in G.Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 'Homosexualität und Transvestition im Schamanismus', *Anthropos*, 1970, vol. 65, p. 197 (this was republished in enlarged form as *Der Weibmann. Kultischer Geschlechtswechsel im Schamanismus. Eine Studie zur Transvestition und Transsexualität bei Naturvölkern*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1984).
- 7 Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, op. cit., p. 193; M.Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne. Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol*, trans. J.M.Cohen, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1965, p. 117.
- 8 H.Baumann, *Das dopplete Geschlecht. Studien zur Bisexualität in Ritus und Mythos*, Berlin, Dietrich Riemer, 1986, p. 243.
- 9 A.L.Tsing, cited in R.C.Morris, 'All made up: performance theory and the new anthropology of sex and gender', *American Review of Anthropology*, 1995, vol. 24, p. 574. Tsing calls the transformed shaman 'a woman with a penis', which is somewhat limiting.
- 10 Among the Iban of Central Borneo, effeminate shamans are conceived of as women, not a third sex. S.O.Murray, 'Profession-defined homosexuality: introduction', in Murray, *Oceanic Homosexualities*, New York, Garland, p. 259. For compendious but succinct accounts of the homosexual factor in shamanism, see R.P.Conner, D.H.Sparks and M.Sparks, *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*, London, Cassell, 1997, pp. 27–31; and A.Cardin, *Guerreros, chamanes y travestís. Indicios de homosexualidad entre los exóticos*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 1984, pp. 41–4, 125–210.
- 11 The earliest outside observers of the shaman as a Siberian tribal functionary were explorers and ethnologists of the Russian Empire, who had a negative reaction to this animistic shape-changing. Catherine the Great instructed one expedition to put down the shamanistic 'women/men' because they neither bred, enriching the Russian population, nor hunted, enriching the Imperial exchequer. See L.S.Vdovin, in M.A.Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia. A Study in Social Anthropology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1914, pp. 263–5. Soviet anthropologists, lumbered with Marxist doctrine, downplayed the mystical and sexual aspects of shamanism, and presented it as a mutable historical phenomenon, varying according to the socioeconomic development of a given people.
- 12 Among the Tajik and Uzbek shamans, spirits are usually imagined in human shape and rarely as animals. R.O.Manning, 'Shamanism as a profession', in Bharati (ed.), op. cit., p. 152.
- 13 W.Bogoras, quoted in Czaplicka, op. cit., pp. 245–6.
- 14 Bleibtreu-Ehrenburg, 'Homosexualität', p. 201.
- 15 E.Crawley, *Dress, Drinks and Drums. Further Studies of Savages and Sex*, London, Methuen, 1931, p. 150. Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 'Homosexualität', p. 209. She sees the graduation from wearing a female hairstyle to taking a male husband among male shamans as a progression from transvestism to homosexuality.

- 16 Bogoraz, quoted in Murray, op. cit., p. 303; Czaplicka, op. cit., p. 252.
- 17 W.Jochelson, quoted in Czaplicka, op. cit., p. 251.
- 18 The classic essay on shamanic performance techniques provides a *catalogue raisonné* of the shaman's 'theatrical' devices: L.H.Charles, 'Drama in shaman exorcism', *Journal of American Folklore*, 1953, vol.66, pp. 95–122. See also E.T.Kirby, *Ur-drama. The Origins of Theatre*, New York, New York University Press, 1975, pp. 2–3, 20–2. G.Ottaviani, *L'attore e lo sciamano. Esempi d'indentità nelle tradizioni dell'Estremo Oriente*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1984, is also based entirely on standard English-language sources.
- 19 C.Niessen, *Handbuch der Theater-Wissenschaft*, Emsdetten, Lechte, 1949, vol. I, pp. 208, 525.
- 20 This was not uncommon among the Native Americans of British Columbia. See I.A.Lopatin, *Social Life and Religion of Indians in Kitimat, British Columbia*, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1945, p. 78.
- 21 J.G.Gmelin, *Reise durch Sibirien, von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743*, Göttingen, 1751–52, vol. I, p. 275.
- 22 Roger Caillois, quoted in J-J.Wunenberger, *La fête, le jeu et le sacré*, Paris, Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1977, p. 59.
- 23 Women are never allowed to attack Rangda, but they do share in the self-stabbing. J.Belo, *Trance in Bali*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 32, 70; J.Emigh and J.Hunt, 'Gender bending in Balinese performance', in L.Senelick (ed.), *Gender in Performance. The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1992, pp. 207–16; J.Hunt, *Gender Bending: Transgressions and Anomalies of Gender in Balinese Performance*, BA thesis, Brown University, 1987, p. 28.
- 24 D.Conquergood, 'Performance theory, Hmong shamans, and cultural politics', in J.G.Reinelt and J.R.Roach (eds), *Critical Theory and Performance*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1992, pp. 48–53.
- 25 Eliade, *Mephistopheles*, p. 13.
- 26 M.Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 344, 460–3.
- 27 E.Zolla, *The Androgyne. Reconciliation of Male and Female*, New York, Crossroad, 1981, p. 82.
- 28 The fear that the magical potential of shape-shifting is in itself as subversive as any sexual practice it might entail is not specifically European; it is shared by any order strong on social control. Chinese cross-dressers (in life, not on the stage) were severely prosecuted, not for same-sex relations, but for deceptions redolent of witchcraft. In early nineteenth-century Chinese law, to cross-dress as a woman, along with 'confusing people's minds', was an offence punishable by strangulation, not incidentally the penalty for sorcery. In 1807 the Board of Punishment sentenced a 'fairy fox' or male transvestite to strangulation for practising sorcery and diagnosing illnesses from incense smoke; his non-cross-dressing partner in homosexual acts was sentenced merely to deportation for complicity. M.J.Meijer, 'Homosexual offences in Ch'ing law', *T'oung Pao*, 1985, vol. 71, p. 115.
- 29 F.Ström, *Loki. Ein mythologisches Problem*, Göteborg, Almqvist & Wiksell, Elanders boktr. aktiebolag, 1956. For the contribution of *seidr* to the growth of anti-homosexual prejudice, see Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 'Homosexualität', pp. 111–25.
- 30 J.M.van der Kroef, 'Transvestism and the religious hermaphrodite in Indonesia', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 1954, vol. 3, pp. 93, 259.
- 31 Kirby, op. cit., p. 110.
- 32 See R.Taylor, 'Two pathic subcultures in ancient Rome', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, January 1997, vol. 7, pp. 329–30; Plautus, *Menæchmi*, lines 513–14. See also J.M.Cody, 'The *senex amator* in Plautus' *Casina*', *Hermes*, 1976, vol. 104, pp. 453–76, which carefully distinguishes the transvestism called for by a comic plot from otherwise condemned homosexual behaviour.
- 33 Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 'Homosexualität', p. 219.
- 34 According to Rabun Taylor, the first scholar to draw a connection between the ancient Roman Galli, eunuchs who served a female fertility goddess and the modern hijras was A.M.Shah, 'Eunuchs, pavaiyas and hijadas', in an inaccessible journal *Gujarat Sahitya Sabha*, Amdavad, Karyavahi, Ahmedabad, 1945–46, vol. 2, pp. 3–75.
- 35 W.Dalrymple, 'The hidden world of India's eunuchs', *Sunday Correspondent* (London), 1 March 1990, p. 13; G.Busquet and C.Beaune, *Les Hermaphrodites*, n.p., Jean-Claude Simon, 1978, pp. 116–19, 144–5; M.E.Opler, 'The Hijaṛō-a (hermaphrodites) of India and Indian national character: a rejoinder', *American Anthropologist*, 1960, vol. 60, p. 506.

- 36 C.Adams, 'The straight dope', *Boston Phoenix*, 12 August 1994, p. 3.
- 37 Dalrymple, op. cit., p. 15; W.D.O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 297; S.Nanda, 'Hijras: an alternative sex and gender role in India', in G.Herd (ed.), *Third Sex, Third Gender. Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, New York, Zone Books, 1994, pp. 373–417. A history of the eunuch in Indian society can be found in Z.Jaffrey, *The Invisibles. A Tale of the Eunuchs of India*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997.
- 38 Busquet and Beaune, op. cit., pp. 151–5; S.Nanda, 'The hijras of India: cultural and individual dimensions of an institutionalized third gender role', in E.Blackwood (ed.), *The Many Faces of Homosexuality. Anthropological Approaches to Homosexual Behavior*, New York, Harington Park Press, 1986, pp. 37–8.
- 39 N.Naqvi and H.Mujtaba, 'Two Baluchi buggas, a Sindhi zenana, and the status of hijras in contemporary Pakistan', in S.O.Murray and W.Roscoe (eds), *Islamic Homosexualities. Culture, History, and Literature*, New York, New York University Press, 1997, pp. 263–4; S.Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman. The Hijras of India*, Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, 1990, p. 10. For a photographic study see M.E.Warner, *Falkland Road: Prostitutes of Bombay*, New York, Alfred A.Knopf, 1981.
- 40 Nanda, 'The hijras of India', pp. 43, 50; Busquet and Beaune, op. cit., pp. 153, 208; Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*, pp. 10–11, 19–21.
- 41 O'Flaherty op. cit., pp. 88–9.
- 42 O.Harris, 'Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic', in M.Bloch and J.Parry (eds), *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 103, 107.
- 43 N.J.Bradford, 'Transgenderism and the cult of Yelamma: heat, sex, and sickness in South Indian ritual', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1983, vol. 39, pp. 311–19. Transgendering and the heightening of gender by ritual implications which entails permanent transformation is exclusively a male prerogative in Hindu society. In the Southern Indian ritual, the Gogo, young women act out a stereotypical aggressive virility, but this is only temporary, and the ritual power resides in the temporary reversal through transvestism rather than in a heightening of gender. Bradford, p. 322, n. 13.
- 44 P.Fry, 'Male homosexuality and Afro-Brazilian possession cults', in S.O.Murray (ed.), *Male Homosexuality in Central and South America*, San Francisco, Insituto Obregón, 1987, p. 94.
- 45 J.S.Trevisan, *Perverts in Paradise*, trans. M.Foreman, London, GMP, 1986, pp. 171–92; J.H. Sweet, 'Male homosexuality and spiritism in the African diaspora: the legacies of a link', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1996, vol. 7, pp. 184–202. The re-invention by slaves and their descendants to create a New World version of African ritual and cosmology has been compared to the re-invention of Christianity by the Mormons.
- 46 Quoted in Fry, op. cit., p. 63.
- 47 D.Kulick, *Travesti. Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 246–7.
- 48 Fry, op. cit., pp. 56–79; P.Fry, 'Male homosexuality and spirit possession in Brazil', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1986, vol. 11, pp. 138–41; Kulick, op. cit.
- 49 N.Besnier, 'Polynesian gender liminality through time and space', in Herdt, op. cit., pp. 315–18.
- 50 T.Kiefer, 'Institutionalized friendship and warfare among the Tausug of Jolo', *Ethnology*, 1968, vol. 7, pp. 225–44; T.Kiefer, *The Tausug*, New York, Holt, 1972; H.A.Nimmo, 'The relativity of sexual deviance. A Sulu example', *Papers in Anthropology*, 1978, vol. 19, pp. 91–7.
- 51 An unequivocal conflation of transvestism, homosexuality and performance occurs amidst the *bisu* priests of South Sulawesi: the *masri*, boys aged 8 to 12, veiled and dressed as women, dance provocatively to allure married men who slip money down their blouses. The explicit purpose of the dance was 'sexual incitement'. They enjoyed unprecedented popularity from about 1928 to the mid-1950s. In Java, the dancing girls are sometimes replaced by boys in female dress who are rumoured to serve as bedmates for prominent men: *bedaja* means both dancing girl and catamite: van der Kroef, op. cit., pp. 94–5. See also S.O.Murray, 'Male actresses in Islamic parts of Indonesia and the Southern Philippines', in Murray and Roscoe (eds), op. cit., pp. 256–61.

- 52 F.-P. Blanc, 'Le crime et le péché de Zina en droit Mâlékite (l' exemple de l' Afrique du Nord)', in J. Poumarde and J.-P. Royer (eds), *Droit, histoire et sexualité*, Lille, Publications de l' Espace Juridique, 1987, p. 356. Omar applied the same measure.
- 53 N. Barker, *The Sultans*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1973, p. 140; D. Urquhart, *The Lebanon: A History and A Diary*, London, 1860, vol. II, pp. 178–9.
- 54 F. S. Krauss, *Das Geschlechterleben in Glauben, Sitte und Brauch der Japaner*, Leipzig, Deutsche Verlagsactiengesellschaft, 1907, pp. 104–5. For a description of a Berber tribal dance performed in a boy brothel in Marrakech, where the dance was clearly intended as an enticement to sexual consummation, see M. Davidson, *Some Boys*, London, GMP, 1988, pp. 7–15.
- 55 Fr. R. Rutt, 'The flower boys of Silla (Hwarang): notes on the sources', *Royal Asiatic Society, Transactions of the Korean Branch*, 1961, vol. 38, pp. 56–60; Y. J. Kim, 'The Korean namsadang', *The Drama Review*, 1981, vol. 15, pp. 9–16.
- 56 B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984, p. 110. Orpheus was, of course, accounted the inventor of pederasty.
- 57 'Chironom Ledam molli saltante Bathyllo, / Tuccia vesicae non imperat; Appula gannit, / Sicut in amplexu; subitum et miserabile longum / Attendit Thymele; Thymele tune rustica discit' (Satire VI, lines 63–6), A. F. Cole (ed.), *The Satires of Juvenal*, London, J. M. Dent, 1906, pp. 96–8.
- 58 According to Suetonius, Trajan's lover was Pylades II, the greatest actor of his time – picture John F. Kennedy bedding Laurence Olivier instead of Marilyn Monroe.
- 59 M. W. Gleason, 'The semiotics of gender: physiognomy and self-fashioning in the second century CE', in D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (eds), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 397, 409. Some *cinaedi* were destined to become temple officials or court officers, which links with the practices of other cultures, such as the eunuchism of Imperial Chinese palace officials or the enforced celibacy of Catholic priests.
- 60 F. Graf, 'Gestures and conventions: the gestures of Roman actors and orators', in J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Gesture*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 48.
- 61 B. Sergent, *L' Homosexualité initiatique dans l' Europe ancienne*, Paris, Payot, 1986, p. 162; G. Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, *Tabu Homosexualität. Die Geschichte eines Vorurteils*, Frankfurt am Main, S. Fischer, 1978, esp. pp. 106–37.
- 62 K. M. Ringrose, 'Living in the shadows: eunuchs and gender in Byzantium', in G. Herdt (ed.), *Third Sex, Third Gender. Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, New York, Zone Books, 1994, pp. 89, 100–2; P. Brown, 'Bodies and minds: sexuality and renunciation in early Christianity', in Halperin *et al.* (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 389–415; W. Stevenson, 'The rise of eunuchs in Greco-Roman antiquity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, April 1995, p. 511.
- 63 Condemnation was also visited on the use of beast masks and the assumption of clerical garb by players. 'If any player shall be dressed in a priestly or monastic robe, or that of a nun, or any other clerical garb, let him undergo corporal punishment and be condemned to exile', second *capitulum* of Charlemagne (798), quoted in J. D. A. Ogilvy, 'Mimi, scurrae, histriones: entertainers of the early Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 1963, vol. 38, p. 608.
- 64 Ogilvy, *op. cit.*, p. 605.

Chapter two

The Greek for it is ‘gynaikíseōs’

[W]e do not know how the words sounded, or where precisely we ought to laugh, or how the actors acted, and between the foreign people and ourselves there is not only difference of race and tongue but a tremendous breach of tradition.

Virginia Woolf¹

Women’s wear

In Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, when the stranger who is Dionysus sets out to madden and destroy King Pentheus, he entices him to spy on the maenads during their orgies on Mount Kithaeron. As Pentheus begins to succumb to this temptation, the first thing Dionysus insists on is that the arrogant young ruler change clothes.

Dionysus. Now, however,
You must drape your body in a linen gown.
Pentheus. What do you mean?
You want *me*, a man, to wear a woman’s dress?²

Pentheus’ outrage is understandable. In Attica of the fifth century BCE strict division was made between adult male, adolescent male and female attributes, with clothing the foremost token of gender. ‘When a garment hides the body, its function is to designate what it hides, and both sexes are indicated by specific clothing and attributes.’³ Vase paintings of the period use it as a kind of visual shorthand: the short chiton and himation, along with a beard and a staff, are signifiers of men, while respectable women are shown garbed in these garments’ longer variants. By the time *The Bacchae* was first performed, long chitons were out of fashion as men’s wear.

However, according to Pollux, the stage costume of Dionysus had become conventional: a long saffron-hued gown, accessorized with an *anthinos* sash and wand. *Anthinos* is glossed by Liddell and Scott as ‘flowered, bright-coloured, of women’s dress...gay-coloured dresses worn by the *hetairai* or courtesans.’⁴ Dionysus’ personal wardrobe is therefore effeminate in the extreme, with touches of whorishness. What he proposes to Pentheus as a disguise for mingling with maenads is simpler: *bussínos péplous*, a *peplos* of Eastern linen. In his translation of *The Bacchae*, William Arrowsmith renders this simply as ‘women’s clothes’.⁵ Although technically the *peplos* (Latin, *peplum*) was a woollen garment fastened with a pin, Greek tragic poets employ the word generically to mean a long dress, much as the Elizabethans used ‘gown’. Monumental evidence shows it only on women, barbarians, or, on ceremonial occasions, priests,

musicians and charioteers. *Bussos*, the material of which Pentheus' garment is to be woven, was an Egyptian linen, often used to wrap mummies; as the stuff of clothing, it is mentioned by Æschylus and others as worn by Greek women, Persian female mourners and male initiates of the mysteries of Isis.⁶ *Bussínos péplous* implies unGreek effeminacy. Hence the indignation in Pentheus' response, whose Greek words connote, 'Am I to stop being a man and be ranked with women?'

Dionysus goes on to prescribe a wig of long curls and a *mitra* or snood, along with the thyrsos and fawnskin: all these were attributes of the god himself and his followers. Except for the long hair (used on Greek theatre masks to identify the gender of a female character), these are not specifically feminine attributes. Devotees of both sexes bound their brows with the *mitra* when participating in the rituals. But they are part of the further abasement of Pentheus. On their first encounter, the king had sized up his prisoner, mocking his Lydian allure:

Well,

you are physically attractive, stranger,
At least to women....
For your locks are long (no wrestler you),
Spilling down your cheeks, meet for desire;
And carefully groomed white skin you have,
No product of sunlight, but of the dark,
When you hunt Aphrodite with your beauty.⁷

This is in line with the influence of Eastern religion on the Greek cults of the time, and the newer practice in Greek painting and sculpture of depicting Dionysus as a beardless ephebe from Lydia, replacing the older, sterner, bearded image. Pentheus presumably wears his hair close-cropped, a fashion among athletes, and then, as now, a token of manliness ('no wrestler you'). So it is all the more humiliating that, to achieve his ends, Pentheus must assume the hyacinthine locks he had just mocked for their girlishness.

The hostile make-over of Pentheus, the preliminary phase of his (literal) deconstruction, was probably not invented by Euripides: he had borrowed it from his sources, but imprinted it with abiding beliefs in the magical potency of clothing. It was not uncommon in Dionysiac rituals to assume the clothing of the opposite sex; at the Argive festival, the *Hybristika* and the Dionysian festival of *Lenaia*, women donned the male chiton and chlamys, while adult men put on the *peplos* and veil.⁸ At the *Oskhophoria*, a choral procession around Dionysus' sanctuary down to the shrine of Athena on the Phaleron coast was led by *oskhophoroi* ('vine-bearers'), two high-born youths wearing female *stolai* and snoods, and imitating female mannerisms. This cross-dressing has been explained as an incarnate allusion to the mythical youths whom Theseus disguised as maidens, a tribute for the Minotaur. Significantly, the ceremony included a foot race, physical exercises and naked dances by young men, thereby combining effeminating transvestism with male-affirming athleticism. Even as late as the second and third centuries CE, the writers Aristides and Philostratos considered such ritual cross-dressing a matter of routine, and Lucian finds it odd that a certain Demetrios 'alone of all the rest did not put on women's clothing in the rites of Dionysus'.⁹

None of these Athenian Dionysiac festivals were rites of initiation. Elsewhere, however, initiatory rites made a central feature of transvestism. Certain Spartan war dances kicked off with men donning women's clothing and grotesque female masks, before replacing them with armour. The *Ekdusia* or 'Festival of Disrobing' of Phaistos required young men to put on a woman's *peplos* and then cast it off, assume male attire, and swear an oath of citizenship before they could graduate from the youth corps and enter the society of adult male citizens.¹⁰ This temporary adoption of the characteristics of the opposite sex signals a

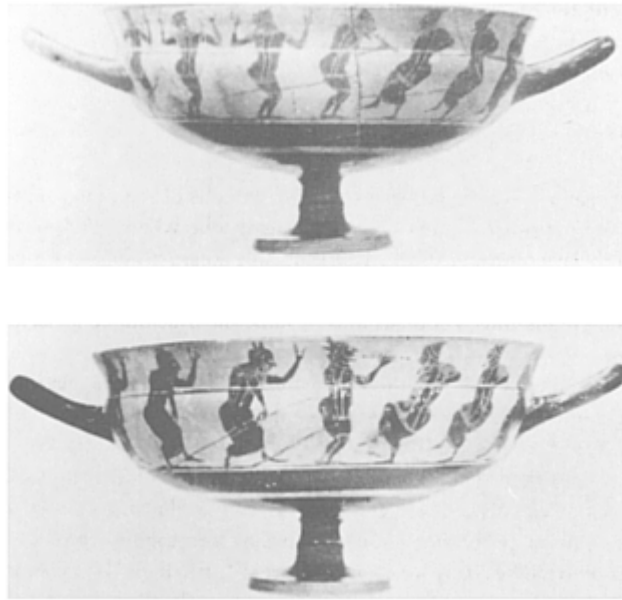


Figure 5 Men dancing, dressed as women. Black-figure kylix. By courtesy of the Allard Pierson Stichting, Amsterdam.

period of transition, reversing the order characteristic of the period 'between separation and reintegration into a new order'.¹¹ Early puberty, in Greek terms, was a state of sexual ambiguity. These ceremonies sharply demarcate two states of being: undifferentiated adolescence is being sloughed off as one enters a more rigidly defined maturity.

The ephemeral transvestism of these ceremonials rehearses the enforced if temporary cross-dressing by the god himself. Legend has it that he was reared in the women's quarters of the palace of King Arthanas of Orchomenos, disguised as a girl to protect him from the wrath of Hera. Despite the protective camouflage, the goddess recognized him and drove him raving mad. Only after protracted travels in the East did Dionysus return to Europe to be purified by his grandmother Rhea of the murders he had committed in his distraction. From her hands, when he had recovered from his dangerous mania, he received the bacchant's costume, the *stole*. It served as a potent emblem of the purification that delivered him from his manic state and enabled him to learn his own ceremonial. One myth relates that the first of his manifestations or *parousia* was in the guise of a young girl, appearing to the three daughters of King Minyas of Orchomenos to persuade them, unsuccessfully, to join the women who had taken to the hills.¹²

In the legendary *vita* of Dionysus then, women's clothes have served as a shield, a penitential garment, an emblem of sanity regained, and a tool of trickery. This last function, cross-dressing as a stratagem of deceit, is the central point of the myth of Leukippos which inspired the *Ekdusia*. He had disguised himself as a girl to approach the misanthropic nymph Daphne and join her companions; when his disguise was penetrated, the maidens, spurred on by Apollo's jealousy, killed the hero.¹³

Since sacred vestments are 'a material link between the person and the supernatural',¹⁴ Dionysus' followers must perforce adopt a similar disguise, so that, as Detienne puts it, 'celebrant and celebrated share a single garment, beneath which both are other...in a state that is a common denominator between the god

and the man'.¹⁵ Even the calf sacrificed to Dionysus on Tenedos had to be shod with the Dionysiac buskin. Pentheus, if he is to masquerade as a follower of the god, follows these rules, but significantly it is the new Lydian portraiture that he is compelled to copy.

Diodorus Siculus recorded that Dionysus appeared in two forms: an ancient one and a modern one. The ancient one wore a long beard, following the custom of early mankind; the modern one appeared youthful and effeminate, i.e. clean-shaven. In almost all Attic vase paintings, both black-figure and red-figure, Dionysus appears as a bearded adult, fully clothed in a long chiton; but around 425 BCE, this depiction is replaced by a beardless nude youth, first on the Parthenon sculptures, then on vases. By 420 BCE, it had supplanted the hirsute image. More an androgyne than a transvestite, this Dionysus is described by the Sophist Aelius Aristides in a festal speech (117 or 129 CE):

Thus the God is at once male and female. His form bespeaks his nature, for everything about him is double; for amid youths he is a girl and amid girls a youth, and amidst men was he a beardless youth bursting with vital energy.¹⁶

A strong argument has been made that the eidolon of the beardless Dionysus originated in the theatre, where it was accepted as yet another aspect of the god, one of his masks. The beardless Dionysus was 'a mortal disguised as a god disguised as an adolescent...explicit depictions of a figure from the theater, rather than a figure from myth.'¹⁷ Certainly his ritual garb is believed to be the pattern for the costumes of the tragic theatre,¹⁸ and was itself modelled on the court dress of Near-Eastern monarchs. This Asian aspect, redolent of voluptuous hedonism, was a particularly useful signifier to indicate the effeminacy of the role, and by the end of the sixth century BCE Dionysus, as depicted on black-figure vases, had exchanged his long festal gown for a long-sleeved Persian garment. Coming from Lydia and Phrygia, he has adopted the costume of an exotic mollicoddle.¹⁹ In Euripides' play, Dionysus' Asiatic effeminacy is both a divine disguise, meant to lure women and put Pentheus off guard, and a theatrical costume, a mask representing a mask.

Since women's clothes are, to use Dodd's phrase, the livery of the god,²⁰ Pentheus must be enrobed in them to assimilate with Dionysus before he can be properly sacrificed: but, again recapitulating the god's own biography, he must first be maddened and, as Dionysus instructs, 'put...into an inconstant frenzy. For never in his senses will he submit to don woman's dress, though driven out of his wits he will' (lines 850–3). Pentheus does not willingly assume the ritual garb until he has been 'dedicated' to the god. Unsuspecting, he is incorporated in a portion of the divinity which will render him a fit victim.²¹

Re-entering deliriously in the *peplos* and *mitra*—an entrance which must have had a startling effect on the original audiences—Pentheus speaks as coyly as any neophyte in drag: 'Well, how do I look? Have I not the very bearing of Ino or of my mother Agaue?'²² Perhaps as a parody of an Homeric arming scene, Euripides has Dionysus ('let me be your dresser') adjust the curls of the wig, the girdle and the uneven hem-line. Evidently Pentheus has frozen into the conventional posture of a bacchant, with his head thrown back and his throat exposed, looking over his shoulder to the back of his left leg, 'a posture which involves bending the left knee and raising the left heel'.²³ Imagine Mussolini coming out on to a Roman balcony in a Balenciaga gown and going up *en pointe*, and you have some idea of the intended impression: Pentheus can only have taken leave of his senses. Later, under attack by the maenads, he will regain them briefly, but only after he has snatched off the wig and *mitra* and thus broken their spell.

The destruction of Pentheus was a popular motif in Greek art, but not its preliminary step, the scene of his transformation into a man in drag. It is likely that Euripides seized on that neglected moment and elaborated it as a shock effect, particularly since the male donning of the *peplos* was generally associated with hijinks and comedy. As a festive garment, the *peplos* played an important part in Athenian religious

rites: every four years Athena was presented with one. The institutionalized rites of Dionysus were characterized as 'a joyous transvestism',²⁴ joyous because voluntary. The other males in *The Bacchae*, who willingly adopt the Dionysian costume, are not murdered. True, Kadmos has to see his line blotted out, but Tiresias, persecuted by Pentheus, is left unscathed by the god. Pentheus' transformation is horrific because he has resisted it. A conventional gesture of civic ceremonial becomes a sensational punishment of Pentheus' *hybris*. Putting ritual transvestism to tragic ends is Euripides' great innovation in *The Bacchae*.

Reporting on the expulsion of Nancy Jean Burkholder from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1991, when it was discovered that she was a male-to-female transsexual, a journalist evokes *The Bacchae* in his search for a precedent. Burkholder was not torn limb from limb, but the 'womyns' 'feelings of betrayal, rage, and violation did border on the murderous'.²⁵ Feminists who would otherwise argue that biology is not destiny were here insisting that, in the case of transsexuals, it was, and that the cherished creed of the social construction of gender did not apply in such cases. Burkholder, unlike Pentheus, had not come to pry but genuinely wanted to take part in the communal activities; however, her transsexualism was seen, like his transvestism, as a masquerade that mocked the sanctified intimacy of the women. Even if Dionysus has wrought the young ruler into a woman to all intents and purposes (as the surgeons and psychologists did to Burkholder), Pentheus remains a mocking simulacrum in the maddened eyes of the biological world. His transvestism is thus doubly fatal: within the culture he becomes inadequate as man and king, within the cult he is inadequate as woman and votary.

Playing the game

In an examination of the images on certain kylices produced between 510 and 460 BCE, Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague question why bearded men are depicted with the feminine attributes of long himations, parasols, earrings; although certain types of women are shown in their company—flute-girls, slave-attendants and dancers—the sexual partner, the *hetaira*, is lacking. Their conclusion was that the images represented a *kōmos* or drinking-party, an occasion of wine, song and dance, when men could figuratively let down their hair and for a brief space become feminine and/or oriental (much the same thing to a Greek male). Donning female attire does not unman them; it deifies their gender, making them ambisexual, transcending categories like certain gods of the Hellenized East. They retain the staffs and beards of their male identities, but, aided by drink and feminine accessories, take on a tincture of otherness. The male/female binary is less important here than the self/other, and the scholars conclude that to throw a party—*kōmazein*—meant to play the other.²⁶

This toying with alterity was permissible and mirthful because the disorder was regulated: besides the patterned music and dance, even the drinking was done by numbers. Dionysiac rites were less ruly and therefore more dangerous: the authors note that on Attic pottery contemporaneous with these kylices, Dionysus is never shown in the company of men, only of satyrs and women. These women, often clad in the Bacchic fawnskin or grasping snakes in their fists, incarnate an other which is closer to the bestial or the natural; thus they are able to 'approach the god without undergoing a fundamental metamorphosis'.²⁷ Men cannot or dare not undergo such a metamorphosis: as it did with Pentheus, it would mean the disintegration of the socially constructed self and ultimate destruction. The best that men can do is don the girlish garb of Dionysus and, under the influence of his wine, party on.

This stag party charade also stands in stark contrast to the civic Dionysian ceremony entrusted to the leading female citizens who celebrated it in a strange amalgam of publicity and privacy. The site of the cult was open only once a year, and next to the altar stood a stele inscribed with the ceremony's rules, but the officiants, who were the only ones allowed to take part in and observe the ceremony, were forbidden to