A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CROSS-DRESSING AND DRAG IN GENDER PERFORMANCE AND CAMP IN CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN DRAMA AND FILM

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Centre for Study of Drama
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My thesis focuses on drag as a major component of camp in relation to gender performance. My position on drag for the purposes of this thesis is that drag’s function within camp is about challenging and disrupting normative notions of gender and sexuality. I examine how cross-dressing located in sexual difference and imbricated by models of expressivity has complicated the perceived potential for drag and camp to challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality. Chapter one shows how performance metaphors for gender located in the act of cross-dressing reinscribe traditional notions of personhood. Chapter two shows that drag moves off the binaries of man and woman, and sexual difference located in cross-dressing, by using the norms associated with sexual difference and mandatory heterosexuality to resist the norms. This moves cross-dressing into the realm of drag and gender play. I use two Hollywood films to illustrate that while cross-dressing is incorporated into drag and gender play, cross-dressing alone does not signal drag. Likewise camp uses parody, but parody alone is not camp. Chapter three explores notions of “identity” and the need to open up certain theoretical discourses, specifically feminist and lesbian
theoretical discourses, which are still bound to conventional notions about camp, to critical revision. In this chapter The Greater Toronto Drag King Society’s performances illustrate camp’s potential to articulate genders and sexualities beyond the traditional binaries. Chapter four moves into the possibilities for the proliferation of identities in drag and camp. Drag is theorized as “cross-species-dressing” in examples where animals, people and machines are entangled in complex hybrid relationships which explode notions of the organic dimensions of body as self. The cyborg is a fascinating but until now unexplored application in which to consider “couplings” which undo normative notions of gender and sexuality in drag and camp.
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You’re born naked and everything you put on after that is drag.

RuPaul (Drag Diaries)

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my thesis is on drag as a major component of camp in relation to gender performance. My position on drag for the purposes of this thesis is that drag’s function within camp is about challenging and disrupting normative notions of gender and sexuality. Drag articulates camp’s fascination with gender and sexual identity, and disrupts identities bound to traditional notions of gender and sexuality. I am defining drag, a term traditionally conflated and used interchangeably with cross-dressing, beyond sartorial address. Drag encompasses gender play and includes props, costumes, role playing and reversals. Drag moves off strict binaries and into self-aware and self-reflexive discourses, effecting fluid representations of gender and the fragmentation of conventional gender boundaries.

The conflation of the terms drag and cross-dressing hinders drag’s potential to move beyond the binary of man and woman and heterosexual sexuality, a binary usually located in the traditional usage of the term cross-dressing. As we see in chapter three on “Female Camp,” the inability of some theorists to regard camp as a powerful site at which to articulate feminist and lesbian discourse and subversive gender play is based on their limiting drag to cross-dressing. Drag expands upon the notion of cross-dressing, utilizing the idea of crossing over to something other than what is expected or within the
boundaries of a contained self. Within drag, cross-dressing often appears as a metaphor, as is exemplified in chapter three, and moves into a notion of post-cross-dressing as shown in chapter four, "Entangled Identities and Cyborg Territories," where issues of fluid identity, gender and sexuality are hyperbolized and exploded.

Chapter One: Gender Performance and Camp

Chapter one will investigate some of the discourses and assumptions around gender performance and performativity. I will explore notions in contemporary critical theory of performance as a metaphor for the constitution of gender. Performance metaphors foreground certain qualities which are shared among theatre, gender and camp but have, even as Judith Butler (1997) now admits, limitations. Problems for the metaphor often arise when it is intertwined with expressive models for gender behaviour and sexual difference. Cross-dressing, for example, is often seen as the literal performance of and answer to the "construction" of gender, by performing gender on the "wrong" body. This chapter begins to introduce the problem of cross-dressing as a tool to subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality. Drag in relation to cross-dressing will be addressed in chapter two.

Readings of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990a) have contributed to certain assumptions which are held in relation to performance metaphors. By addressing her concerns with performance metaphors, specifically models of
"expressivity," I situate the way I will be using the notion of gender performance and performativity throughout my thesis.

Judith Butler's work will be applied within a specific framework. Butler does not make the distinction between drag and cross-dressing which complicates even her correctives to certain readings of her work on drag. She notes rightly that there are no more than five paragraphs on drag in her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990a), yet drag has been cited by readers as *the* example which explains the meaning of performativity. Gender performativity has been read as that which constitutes what gender one is based on what one performs (Butler 1997, 19). She rejects the conclusion that gender can be proliferated beyond the binary of "man and woman" depending on what one performs because this assumption valorizes drag as the paradigm of gender performance and as the means by which heterosexual presumption might be undermined through a strategy of proliferation (19). Heterosexual presumption cannot be undermined through strategies of proliferation in this context because proliferation is tied to expressive models of performance. "Drag," in Butler's corrective to the possibilities for proliferation, is an expressive model which holds that some interior truth is exteriorized in performance. I agree that proliferation is not the answer to the binary positions of man and woman that are upheld in cross-dressing, nor does it undermine heterosexual presumption. As I will show in chapter two however, moving off a model of cross-dressing into a paradigm of drag enables a re-vision of the notion of proliferation. Removed
from the arena of cross-dressing, drag entails notions of layering and combining in my analysis. This opens up the possibilities for the proliferation of meanings which challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality. In addition to Butler not making the distinction between cross-dressing and drag, drag is related to “melancholia” for Butler and is constituted as an ungrieved loss for the Other/Object (1997). Based on psychoanalytic models, which I am not using in this thesis, her analysis is entrenched in forms of identification closely tied to those models. My own project looks at the discursive implications for categories of meaning in relation to expressive models (cross-dressing) and models which inhabit the norms to forge resistance (drag). I take Butler’s salient points with respect to these ideas to further and elucidate my own argument.

Jill Dolan in “Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the Performative” (1993) says that “performative metaphors get extended into many cultural avenues through cultural studies, but rarely is theatrical performance a site of such extension” (1993). The following chapters do examine sites where gender performance is literally performed as theatrical performance, for example The Greater Toronto Drag King Society (chapter three), where norms which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, are resisted in performances that hyperbolize performativity. Performance becomes aligned with gender play
(chapter two), a play upon the norms which are the resources for resistance and which comprise gender performativity.

While it can be said that theatrical performance and the performative are not the same because "performance is a genre with its own history, applications, and cultural uses" (Dolan 1993, 423), the intersection of the body with performances which include qualities so available for appropriation and metaphorization for that body is certainly significant and ripe for critical investigation.

My interest in the performative is in relation to signifying practices. Because I do examine theatrical performances in film and drama which use gender as subject matter and locate sites where gender is actually performed, notions of the performative for analysis will include performances where the "living body is the center of semiotic crossing" and the discursive performative, or the acts of signifying systems themselves (language and the codes of textuality) (Phelan 1993, 15). My project combines both of these notions of the performative to investigate how "thoroughly bodies inhabit signifying systems and how signifying systems are . . . organized as bodies" (Phelan 1993, 15-16). This becomes useful for my analysis of bodies which are traditionally read as essentially male and female, feminine or masculine and informs an understanding of how these bodies signify sex, gender and sexuality (terms which will be defined and elaborated on in the thesis).

My definition for gender performance departs from conventional interpretations which have included notions of choice and follows Butler's in
relation to performativity, that is, gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today:

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, constraining the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged. (Butler 1997, 17)

This definition is important to my thesis as a whole where I maintain and illustrate that it is the very norms located in cross-dressing and expressive models for behaviour which are hyperbolized in drag and camp practice to resist those norms.

Chapter one will explore some of the theory around sexual difference in relation to cross-dressing and move into the contemporary fascination with refashioning the body as “a set of possibilities.” Examples from Mae West’s banned camp plays Sex (1926) and The Drag (1927) combine several types of improper gender and sexual behaviour exemplifying how unconventional sexuality, like gender, is often met with censure. I look at the components of camp which make it a useful application to counter the mandated “natural” performances for gender and sexuality. With Sky Gilbert’s play Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home (1989), I begin to explore how camp makes performance metaphors and sexual difference hyperbolic by
confronting ideas of naturalism in fiction and life self-reflexively. Gilbert’s play, however, still retains certain ties to conventional notions of expressivity with respect to his character Tina.

Chapter one serves as an introduction to many of the concepts which circulate in my thesis, many of which are explored more fully in other chapters, the groundwork of which is presented here.

Chapter Two: Drag: An Elementary Fabric of Camp

Chapter one considered certain problems for notions of theatrical performance as a metaphor for the constitution and manifestation of gender identity. Chapter two introduces a notion of gender play which describes the function of drag and camp more aptly than gender performance.

I investigate the more complex layering effect that belongs to the realm of drag, which includes cross-dressing but is not limited to the conventional wisdom and notions surrounding crossed dress (models of expressivity, binary of man and woman, mandatory heterosexuality). Drag includes cross-dressing but is not wholly comprised by it. Cross-dressing alone often appears as parody, and is often based on an essentialist position or expressive model, i.e. that an interior essence can be expressed by dressing as the opposite sex. The traditional conflation of camp with parody resonates with the traditional conflation of drag with cross-dressing all of which problematically culminate as interchangeable signifiers or terms which stand-in for one another. This chapter will show that while camp makes use of parody, parody alone does
not signal camp. Similarly, drag makes use of cross-dressing but cross-dressing alone does not signal drag. Certain cinematic forms resonate with conventional notions as the Hollywood films *Tootsie* (Sidney Pollack, 1982) and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar* (Beeban Kidron, 1995) will show in critical analysis. Keith Cole’s short independent film *Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman* (Erwin Abesamis, 1997) illustrates the potential for a doubling of vision in drag and camp, an expansion of the form and hyperbolization of the codes for gender and sexuality.

I look at the notion of performance as “play” where performance is aligned with gender play, a play upon the norms which are the resources for resistance and which comprise gender performativity. Gender play repeats and destabilizes rigid notions of femininity and masculinity (using the norms as resources to forge resistance, subversion and displacement) usually located in female and male bodies where femininity and masculinity are assumed to be essential to those bodies. Gender play is manifest in drag and camp texts where the body becomes a set of possibilities.

Theoretical discourses limited to an understanding of drag and camp in films or practices which recuperate notions associated with cross-dressing have limited the ability for some theorists to move beyond definitions of drag and camp outside of conventional cross-dressing and parody. By examining the meanings and forms which hinder gender play, it is possible to understand why the conflation of terms stunts camp’s perceived potential to challenge dominant meanings accorded to gender.
Chapter Three: Female Camp

Chapter three focuses on "female camp" and examines certain limiting critical discourses for its potential, such as citations against camp practice in feminist discourse and lesbian critical theory, and some of its stunning possibilities in theory and practice. Camp is problematically bound up with ideas which regard it "as a discourse [which] is both ironically and paradoxically the discourse of hom(m)osexuality, that is male sexuality" (Davy, 243). I will explore misconceptions about camp practice that are based on preconceptions about the gay male tradition of camp, based on a heterosexual paradigm and located in cross-dressing. The obstacles to envisioning a female camp are compounded by the call for a feminist subject position which binds the notion of "femininity" to a "wholistic" and non-negotiable female body paradoxically contested by the terms "feminist" and "femme" which is articulated only in terms of a relation to the privileged and visible "butch." Moving the femme out of the butch-femme economy enables a female camp practice that moves into genders and sexualities. I will explore layering the codes of gender for play in a Drag King camp performance which resists hegemonic and exclusionary interpretations of lesbian and feminist identities and performances.
Chapter Four: Entangled Identities and Cyborg Territories

Chapter three explored the possibilities for notions of gender in camp and drag which expand upon the binaries of man and woman, sexual difference and cross-dressing. Chapter four will focus on hybrid identities and couplings which challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality. Drag is theorized as cross-species-dressing where the emphasis is on notions of fluid identities. I will develop and refashion Donna Haraway's cyborg myth ("A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 1985) to open up the theoretical possibilities for breached boundaries in drag. Examples from the film Tank Girl (Rachel Talalay, 1995) will illustrate possibilities for the proliferations of identity in species permutations and combinations which undermine the notion of 'boundaries' as a stable concept. Conventional referents or boundaries are subject to splittings and unconventional meldings. Animals, people and machines are entangled in complex hybrid relationships which explode notions of the organic dimensions of body as self.

Cross-species-dressing in Batman Returns (Tim Burton, 1992) takes place in an arena of sadomasochism (S/M) which offers resistance to the unitary Western subject and makes possible multiple and shifting identities. I examine the sexual practice of consensual S/M as a parodic structuring device in the film and explore the meanings which make S/M a cyborg practice within this context. Resonating with camp and drag excess, the theatrical paraphernalia associated with S/M can be found in forms of leather, vinyl,
spiked boots, feathers, fur, whips, masks, costumes and scripts. Animal and human guises, like identity, are unstable and are subject to injury and rupture.
NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 Butler revisits and “corrects” readings of her work in her essay “Critically Queer” (1997).
CHAPTER I

Gender Performance and Camp

This chapter will investigate some of the discourses and assumptions around gender performance and performativity as a metaphor for the performance of gender. The circulation of performance metaphors for gender illuminates the commonalities which exist among theatre, gender and camp, but these metaphors have limitations. Problems with a particular metaphor often arise when it is intertwined with expressive models for gender behaviour and sexual difference. Cross-dressing, for example, is often seen as the performed manifestation and answer to the “construction” of gender, by performing gender on a “wrong” body. My chapter begins to introduce why it is problematic to use cross-dressing as a tool to subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality. Problems with cross-dressing include the popular notion of gender as performance in relation to sexual difference.

At the conclusion of Jill Dolan’s 1984 essay, “Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?” we are asked to “stop considering the stage as a mirror of reality” and rather “use it as a laboratory in which to reconstruct new, nongenderized identities” (8). She believes that this process can change “the nature of theatre itself” (8). Dolan’s analysis centers upon the fact that theatre has traditionally been concerned with the stage as a stable mirror reflecting cultural and social organization. The mirror in theatre or frame in traditional Hollywood film functions on the premise of “mimesis,” a term which I am using as defined by Elin
Diamond, which "posits a truthful relation between world and word, model and copy, nature and image, or, in semiotic terms, referent and sign, in which potential difference is subsumed by sameness . . . there is in all mimetic representation an implied axiology, the upholding of truth" (Diamond 1993, 363). That which measures "truth" is a universal standard which is masculine, "the universal male" (364).

The representation of woman’s presence on stage and in film has been theorized around the question of her negation and absence, theories which have focused on the appropriation of the sign of woman with and without her physical presence. Entrenched in classical models which polarize gender upon which theatre criticism has been traditionally based, beginning with Greek drama where the "theatrical mirror purged Greek society of its bad humors and allowed it to function smoothly," Dolan notes that women were "effectively made invisible in both the theatre and on the stage, where men appropriated women's roles and their clothing" (Dolan, 4–5). With respect to the latter part of her observation Dolan refers to cross-dressing as "a recurrent theme in theatre history, closely aligned with its foundation on sexual difference" (5).

The relationship between the mirror, women’s presence as absence, cross-dressing and sexual difference in theory is significant and has implications for how camp is received and dismissed as a critical means to investigate the meanings of gender. While women have been the subject of theoretical re-vision in the post-mirror age of critical theory, cross-dressing
based in sexual difference cannot seem to break away from the confines of the traditional mirror and is often cited\(^2\) (sighted) in critical theory as the example of women’s presence as absence. Notably, this citation occurs when men appropriate women’s roles, clothing and gesture. For instance, Dolan articulates the idea that “[w]omen are non-existent in drag performance, but woman-as-myth, as a cultural ideological object, is constructed in an agreed upon exchange between the male performer and the usually male spectator” (1992, 6). Conversely, cross-dressing and cross casting in feminist theatre and film theory and practice are also often cited as the means to subvert gender roles by foregrounding sexual difference. This is problematically based, however, on an appeal to the body as the “true” referent against which this cross-dressing is played out. Contradicting citations regarding cross-dressing’s usefulness in critiquing socially constructed gender roles abound. Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud 9* (1979) is an example of feminist theatre practice which cross-gender casts (and cross-race, cross-age casts) and is considered to foreground the “arbitrary construction of gender, suggesting a new vision through the political structure of gender play” (Dolan 1992, 7). On the other hand, Elin Diamond believes that in the case of the character Betty, played by a man in Act I, the character is not feminized so much as the female is absented. The man, representing a woman, represents the woman’s place in culture, that she is included “only insofar as she is male” (1990, 97). “What remains is a dress, a palpitation, a scream, all encoded female behaviours adding up to a trace denoting absence” (97). Cross-dressing often has to
negotiate its historical ties to the mirror, the illusionistic representation of some essential idea of woman, the idea of her presence as absence, or its practical potential as a subversive means to investigate the arbitrary construction of gender and gender roles.

Ironically, notions of the universal often get extended into discourses which aim to subvert the universal. Lois McNay describes the essentialist tendency to conflate the social existence of women with their biological functions, and warns that

[although a notion of the body is central to a feminist understanding of the oppression of women, it needs to be thought through carefully if what is regarded as patriarchal logic — the definition of the social category of woman in terms of biological functions — is to be subverted and not compounded. (1992, 18)

There has been critical investigation into the problematic tendencies of certain feminisms3 to recuperate essentialist strains by returning to the body as maternal and as such innately nurturing for example. Judith Butler articulates the central concerns:

Universalistic claims are based on a common or shared epistemological standpoint, understood as the articulated consciousness or shared structures of oppression or in the ostensibly transcultural structures of femininity, maternity, sexuality. . . . [T]he insistence upon the coherence and unity of
the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed. (Butler 1990a, 14)

The appropriation of women’s roles and clothing, as Dolan has noted, is an obvious example of woman’s absence from the stage or film, where she exists in the popular imagination as imitation, as her surface re-presentation. The actual presence of women on stage, however, does nothing to disrupt her absence within the structure of the mirror where truth functions as the attempt to repeat a stable system of reference for the image and idea of woman. The physical presence of a woman on stage or in film reflects the sign of woman, a supposedly unified and coherent representation of gender. Dolan argues, along with what she notes was the contemporary “avant-garde” (3) of the early 1980s, for moving away from the mirror as an accurate representation to questioning the nature of the mirror itself, “and its ability to reflect what is increasingly seen as an unstable, non-unified self” (3).

The ties conventional notions of cross-dressing have to the mirror can be observed in the way Dolan considers feminist analysis superior to and different from the (unrecognized) critical stance of drag and camp, which she considers to be superficial (camp’s ties to the “superficial” will be regarded in terms of one of its major components, artifice, later in this chapter):

The camp context of most gay male drag makes it doubtful that the intent is to deconstruct socialized gender . . . the stakes in the gender game aren’t as high for these particular gay men. They
can easily assume female roles, knowing that onstage, they wear the clothes of the social elite. (Dolan, 6)

Here, Dolan's argument recuperates universalistic tendencies with respect to the notion that gender deconstruction is more aptly suited to wholistic feminist practices because of the shared "stakes" in the "game." However, she also observes that "[m]ale drag mirrors women's socially constructed roles" (6). On the one hand because the "gender game" is not as significant for gay men (according to Dolan), gender deconstruction by cross-dressing in the camp context is not serious. (I question whether situating gender as a "game" and then claiming it not to be serious for a particular social group might indicate the critic's own ambivalence.) Yet, if the mirror can illuminate "women's socially constructed roles" in male drag, there must be a context for critical deconstruction. Dolan leaves no room for the feminist critic to engage in camp and drag performance even though she questions "what might happen if women appropriated gender play onstage, or if lesbians took up male impersonation . . ." (6). Dolan's aim, to create a laboratory-stage which can hold "nongenderized identities," does not take into account the radical implications of transformation for gendered identities in camp performance. The notion of "nongenderized identities" is problematic from many standpoints including that "to deny gender, first of all, is to deny the social relations of gender that constitute and validate the sexual oppression of women: and second, to deny gender is to remain 'in ideology,' an ideology which . . . is manifestly self-serving to the male-gendered subject" (de Lauretis
1987, 15). My thesis considers the possibilities for performances in drag and camp which foreground the social relations of gender by playing upon the significations for gender in ways which do not reinscribe them.

Exploring some of Dolan's assumptions is useful because she articulates several limiting notions circulating in the field with respect to gender performance and cross-dressing. The problems associated with Dolan's theoretical assumptions for gender in performance, having been somewhat revised in her 1992 addendum to her essay (1984), will be revisited in light of other theorists who share similar perspectives. In her addendum Dolan acknowledges the quantum leaps in post modern critical theory of gender performance. Scholars such as Jeanie Forte, Lynda Hart, Kate Davy and Sue-Ellen Case, working at text and nontext-based sites (such as the performance art group Split Britches and the work of Holly Hughes), have focused on “the body as representation and [have] pointed out challenging connections between the performance of gender onstage and the representation of gender in culture” (Dolan, 9). Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler argue “for the clear connection between gender impersonation onstage and in social life”.

The following section will examine the discourses and assumptions around gender performance and performativity in relation to theatre as a metaphor and site for the performance of gender.
The Metaphor

Theatrical performance is a useful but limited metaphor for describing how gender identity is theoretically constituted and manifested. This section will explore the connections between the performance metaphor and notions of expressivity. I will show that expressive models for gender behaviour are intertwined with sexual difference which limits the metaphor to binaristic and non-negotiable positions. The theatrical metaphor becomes increasingly complex when the subject matter is the performance of gender on stage or screen. Not only has gender come to be seen in contemporary theory as a performance (which will be discussed further on) but gender is often performed as the subject matter on stage. Kate Bornstein’s play Hidden: A Gender (1994), for example, engages notions of “the performance of identity” by confronting theatrical expectations about the gender of the performer and the performance of gender, where characters such as Doc Grinder, who is part twentieth century television talk show host, and part nineteenth century medicine side-show Barker, says “the boys and girls in marketing have come up with the ultimate marketing strategy. We’re not going to sell you any products tonight, no, we’re going to sell you gender. And you want to buy it. You want gender because you want to relieve the nagging feeling that you’re not quite a man, you’re not quite a woman” (173). Gender in this example is the subject matter of the theatrical performance where theatrical performance is often cited as that which metaphorically constitutes gender.
The elements and qualities one finds in theatrical performance are analogous to the way gender identity is described in Judith Butler (1990a, 1990b), Sue Ellen Case (1989) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) in terms of spectacle, ritual drama, scripts and costumes. These theatrical characteristics share commonalties with camp performance, linking theatre, film, gender and camp (which hyperbolizes these elements) as sites for critical investigation. For instance, Butler writes that "the formulation of the body as a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted" (Butler 1990b, 276). One does not only do one's gender, one does one's gender in accordance with certain sanctions and prescriptions where the act that one performs pre-exists the performer. As such, "gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again" (Butler, 277). The notion of an act, script, rehearsal and performer critically links the metaphors directly to the stage, screen or mise en scène in question.

Gender performance extends, however, beyond the theatrical metaphor because "gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today" (Butler 1997, 17). For gender performance to be metaphorically aligned with theatrical performance certain assumptions have to be held as true for "the function of metaphor, whereby two different terms become one, is to reproduce the same signs" (Phelan 1993,18).
For instance, the first sentence of Laurence Senelick's introduction to the compilation *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (1992) unifies the terms: "Gender is performance" (ix). Senelick expresses a commonly held notion in the field that the equation of gender with performance is based on external evidence and "outward behavior" where gender exists as perception: "the very components of perceived gender — gait, stance, gesture, deportment, vocal pitch and intonation, costume, accessories, coiffure — indicate the performative nature of the construct" (ix). "Such speculative issues as the meaning" of the performance are deferred, "physicality . . . precedes psychology. (Even in the naturalistic theatre the basic needs of visibility and vocal projection tend to enforce this precedence)" (x-xi). With the emphasis on physicality, the meanings or interpretations of that physicality in relation to expressive models of interpretation, held close in the popular imagination, are often lost. Gender reality is performative only to the extent that it is performed; certain acts, however, are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or reality and are experienced as either conforming to or contesting an expected gender identity (Butler 1990b, 278). The popular theory of "gestures as expressive of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex" (279).
The critical re-evaluation of the stage as a mirror to "reality" enables a return to the mirror self-reflexively, to regard the re-production of gender and its metaphors from a critical perspective. Assumptions about gender and gender performance are naturalized and realized within dramatic texts such that they mirror or participate in the circuit effect of meaning culture produces about gender. Often these assumptions have their basis in sexual difference (the division into male and female) and cross-dressing or cross-casting appears to be a corrective device to subvert gender norms. For example, Senelick states that "gender roles performed by 'performers' never merely replicate those in everyday life; they are more sharply defined and more emphatically presented, the inherent iconicity offering both an ideal and a critique. Cross-dressing, for instance is a basic technique in this procedure" (xi). The notion that sharp definition and emphasis effectively differ from the replication of gender in everyday life or that there is an "inherent" iconicity which can clearly critique gender through cross-dressing is highly problematic and points to the limitations of the metaphor. I will investigate the question of cross-dressing as critique more specifically in chapter two.

Significantly, the attempt to move off a model of "natural" gender, by citing the cross-dressing cure in theatre or film, often reinscribes traditional patterns by recirculating meanings of gesture and clothing/costume as expressive of personhood and gender. What is left unconsidered is how the
medium affects the reception of sartorial display, how it mirrors conventional wisdom about inner truth expressed through clothing.

The connections and assumptions about cross-dressing and expressivity have profound ties to the traditional meanings about costume in theatre and film which affect notions of gender performance. For example, in classical Hollywood cinema there was a tension between costume and narrative which produced "storytelling wardrobes" (Gaines 1990, 180). Clothes functioned to reinforce the narrative "fitted to characters as a second skin", working in this capacity for the cause of narrative by relaying information to the viewer about a 'person'" (181). Jane Gaines's analysis focuses primarily on black and white contemporary dress drama in Hollywood film. It makes some points, however, which are significant with respect to how the perception of an inside can be brought outside sartorially, where costumes index psychology and represent interiority. Costume had to serve the narrative by "restating emotions the actress conveyed through gesture and movement. Stepping into costume, was like stepping into a role. Costumes, furthermore, were expected to express the same feelings ... called for in the part" (184). While Gaines notes that the assumption is that the costume go with as opposed to against the character, which is allegedly the opposite to what occurs in cross-dressing, the notion of "personhood in operation here ... assumes a continuity between inner and outer;" the personality of the wearer can be known through dress (184). In cross-dressing it is assumed that the "personality," the "true gender" of the wearer of the opposite gender's clothing is in conflict
with the crossed dress.\textsuperscript{7} Clothing, with or against, is nonetheless based on expressing a true, coherent inner core on a sexed body which is the fixed referent. That is, the notion of the "wrong body" for a type of clothing fixes that body to an appropriate gender. Models of expressivity are embedded into a medium which upholds the popular notion that the clothes make the man or woman, reinforcing the binaristic positioning of man and woman.

The example also effectively shows how Senelick has a limited understanding of Butler's theory of drag in \textit{Gender Trouble} (1990a) by referring to her to substantiate his position in terms of cross-dressing. He cites Butler: "In imitating gender drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself — as well as its contingency" (Butler 1990, 37). Butler comments upon the misinterpretations of her work, correctly stating that

Gender is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as 'internal' and 'hidden,' nor is it reducible to a surface appearance. . . . In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender; performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of
performativity to performance is, therefore, a mistake. (1997 19-20)

Senelick cites cross-dressing as the “basic technique” for the performer who wants to perform “gender roles” (xi). While his emphasis is on the outward construct, the example of performance in relation to cross-dressing suggests that an expressive model is at work, that an external sartorial crossing has something to say about an interior essence configured on the wrong body. He says that “theatrical gender” is more intelligible “than the behavioral kind. . . . The performer is freer to move in and out of gender roles” (xi). The problem with Senelick’s type of configuration of gender as performance is the notion that one is free to choose which gender one wants to perform in theatrical gender outside of the gender performance the performer brings with him/her to the stage. Moreover, the signification systems influencing the “outward” behaviour are seen to be something separate from that behavior rather than as a play between significations which include behaviour. What is overlooked is that the outward signs do not immediately signal construction or subvert the dominant codes by virtue of the fact that one calls them performative although, as I will show in this thesis, one may use these physicalizations or norms to forge resistance in a performance which comments/plays upon normative notions of gender performance in camp. This thesis will illustrate that drag and camp performances incorporate cross-dressing, the binaries of man and woman
based in sexual difference and notions of expressivity, but are not reduced to these practices.

An introductory example, Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home brings cross-dressing and cross-casting into the realm of camp, situating it within a self-reflexive practice and hyperbolic context which plays between significations for realism, normative gender, sexual difference and sexuality.

Canadian playwright, actor, director, filmmaker, co-founder and former artistic director (1979-1997) of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Sky Gilbert is one of Canada’s “most controversial artistic forces.” In an essay describing the kinds of experimental work the Rhubarb! Festival produces, Gilbert defines theatre as “a special action which is a lie” and takes Cocteau’s assertion that “art is the lie that tells the truth” beyond the mirror as a stable reflection of culture (1986, 5-8). Gilbert’s relationship with camp is connected to his definition of theatre as historically tied up with notions of realism, naturalism, lying and truth. Gilbert’s use of camp in Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home, becomes a tool for the exposition and subversion of the “lie” as it ties in with gender, sexuality and culture’s expectations for the appropriate enactment of the roles associated with males and females. Historically, this lie has been named the “closet” in gay culture as Sue-Ellen Case observes in “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” (1989). Out of this lie or closet has come the language of camp: “the closet has given us camp – the style, the discourse, the mise en scene . . .” (286).
The self-reflexive manifestations of performance metaphors find a home in camp contexts which play upon the significations of gender. The notion of theatricality is central to camp and is connected with the idea of being-as-playing-a-role, an idea which circulates amongst most of the early literature in the field. Susan Sontag, in her famous essay “Notes on Camp,” says: “To perceive [c]amp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre” (1966, 280). The emphasis on camp’s relationship with outward appearances resonates with the Senelick “gender is performance” example cited at the beginning of this chapter, an insistent reminder of the prevalent notions circulating which, like theatre-as-mirror-to-reality, regard outward-performance-as-gender. For example, Jack Babuscio relates

To appreciate camp in things or persons is to perceive the notion of life-as-theatre, being versus role-playing, reality and appearance. . . . Camp, by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles, and in particular, sex roles, are superficial — a matter of style. Indeed, life itself is role and theatre, appearance and impersonation. (1977, 44)

Esther Newton, in her groundbreaking book Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America, likewise maintains that “camp is suffused with the perception of ‘being as playing a role’ and ‘life as theatre’” (1972, 107). Outward performance in camp, however, is not something separate from the
meanings or mandates about gender. Outward roles play upon normative notions of inner truth versus outward reality.

Incorporating notions of expressivity into his play without reducing the play to a model of expressivity (although it does have specific problems which are explored at the end of this chapter), Sky Gilbert uses the camp notion of life as theatre in many self-reflexive ways. His character Lola says,

Yes I'm still alive, I still laugh and cry, muse and eat dinner, only now I do things for real and not on a silver screen. Everyone needs a reality, it's an important part of everyone's life. Except for myself. I have existed in a world of tinsel and sawdust, a mysterious world where anything can happen and often does. The real world is not like that. In the real world there are houses to clean and clothes to iron and lovely giggly feminine daughters and devoted dogs named Eat Me. It is to that mundane, even dull and boring world that I now belong. (63)

The illusion of Hollywood is contrasted with the supposed "real world" or dominant culture where the dominant culture's codes, ironing, cleaning, and being feminine, are foregrounded as contrived gender-specific duties. Normative cues for gender are picked up and blatantly incorporated into the narrative using camp strategies of performativity self-reflexively. Dominant culture naturalizes its prescriptive codes for appropriate gender behaviour like Hollywood illusionistic practices. A notion of "artifice" however, explored further on in this chapter in relation to its ties to the
"superficial," bridges both worlds. Incorporating artifice into its fold, then, camp hyperbolizes what was previously left unacknowledged, unseen, naturalized in dominant culture, i.e. artifice in the guise of nature.

As noted in Lola’s speech above, Hollywood and Real Life are construed as similar fictions. The layering of referents begins with the house into which Lola Starr moves to begin a new “real” life distinct from her glamorous Hollywood life, which is an old 1920s vaudeville theatre. Home and theatre play against one another as signs for “performance.” Likewise, this play, about a home, takes place within a theatre (often called “the house”) and the characters are actors who are playing a role. These roles do not express, however, a “reality” separate from the fictions within which they are constructed. Origins about natural femininity and masculinity are put into question in the context of this reality/fiction. Referents for theatre, performance and gender are layered and unstable, not fixed in coherent representations of self or crossed in the binary of man and woman. My analysis of some of the issues which resonate with Lola Starr begins to introduce the notion that in camp the actors playing their roles are not playing the gender of their role prescriptively, nor are they performing their own gender prescriptively by crossing gender and referring to the true body beneath. Normative referents for gender play against one another, playing upon the norms to resist the norms.
Problematic interpretations of Butler’s work in *Gender Trouble* which find their way into the performance metaphor include the notion that gender is a choice or role, “or that there is a ‘one’ who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. This is a voluntarist account of gender which presumes a subject, intact and prior to its gendering” (1997, 16). My analysis uses at its foundation the following notion of gender performativity as defined by Butler:

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged. (Butler 1997, 17)

While a forcible production and compulsory practice, it is not for that reason fully determining because, as an assignment, it is one “which is never carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate” (17). Camp plays upon performance metaphors, crossing referents from literal performances on stage and screen with the meanings culture holds about gender.

Notions of gender, while moved out of the idea of individual choice, become neither something imposed nor inscribed:
The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.

(Butler 1990b, 277)

The following sections will regard notions of sexual difference and explore some of the components of camp which make it a useful source to critique normative notions of gender and sexuality.

The Body: A Set of Possibilities

Performance metaphors are influenced by the post-structuralist emphasis on the anti-essentialist material and historical refashioning of identity. Essentialism is classically defined in the Aristotelian tradition as "a belief in true essence — that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing," (Fuss 1989, 2) and is "typically defined in opposition to difference" (xii). Anti-essentialist positions (constructionist) within feminist theory assert that the body "is a cultural
construct which does not precede or exist naturally and unproblematically outside this construct” (Schulze 1990, 72):

[ ]ny attempts to posit a ‘natural,’ essentially female body as the basis for a feminine identity or language (independent of patriarchy) are doomed to failure. This is because patriarchal ideology works through the same kind of naturalization of male-female difference. (Schulze, 72)

In terms of gender identity my project resonates with a constructionist position concerned with the “production and organization of differences” (Fuss, 2-3) and (especially in this chapter) seeks to unravel the meanings surrounding notions of sexual difference which make their way onto stage and screen in texts that naturalize the production of gender roles even whilst attempting to subvert them, most commonly through cross-dressing. Importantly, I implicitly bridge essentialism and constructionism by showing that camp uses and recuperates normative notions of gender to challenge these notions.10

The problem with the idea of cross-dressing as a tool to subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality is that cross-dressing is often based in sexual difference which effectively reinscribes gender norms. The notion of sexual difference as the founding moment and unproblematic definition of gender has been examined by critical theorists concerned with the notion that focusing on the biological differences between men and women reverts to an
essentialism which does not take into account historical construction, context and the cultural implication of those positions:

[S]exual difference . . . is taken as prior to social differences which are presumed to be mapped on to, a posteriori, the biological subject. For the constructionist, the natural is itself posited as a construction of the social. In this view, sexual difference is discursively produced, elaborated as an effect of the social rather than its tabula rasa, its prior object. (Fuss, 1989, 3)

The "distinction between sex, as a biological facticity, and gender as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity" (Butler 1990b, 273) is a step towards understanding how we signify culturally as male and female. In The Body and Cinema: Some Problems for Feminism (1988), Annette Kuhn's critical investigation into the relationship between certain types of bodies and cultural interpretation, specifically the female body builder's hyperbolic musculature and femininity, questions, for example, the cultural context in which the body is reduced to a sign of the "natural, the given, the unquestionable" (1988, 55). Sexual difference is defined as "an ideological battleground:"

it holds together — or tries to — a range of discourses and meanings centering on biological sex, social gender, gender identity and sexual object choice. The encapsulation of all these within constructs of sexual difference is a historically-grounded ideological project which works to set up a heterogeneous and
variably determinate set of biological, physical, social, psychological and psychic constructs as a unitary, fixed and unproblematic attribute of human subjectivity. (56)

The effect of sexual difference is that human beings get defined as either male or female and that from this difference come discourses which are centered upon identification and sexuality:

To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (Butler 1990b, 273)

Further, biology (or anatomy), a “system of meaning allegedly beyond work, beyond sociality, beyond ideology” (Schulze, 62), does not operate outside of cultural meanings. Sex is itself a gendered category and as such gender cannot be read as merely the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex: “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts” (Butler 1990a, 7).

“Gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings” claims Teresa de Lauretis in her groundbreaking book The
Technology of Gender (1987, 3). De Lauretis problematizes the historical conception of gender as sexual difference where feminist critical thought was traditionally constrained by a framework of universal sex opposition which did not take into account the differences between women but which universalized them into some essential archetypal Woman, which included "impersonations of a metaphysical-discursive femininity" (2). De Lauretis borrows and modifies Gayle Rubin's (1975) notion of the sex-gender system which established how the cultural conflation of sex with gender creates a symbolic system or system of meanings. These meanings are not "ahistorical emanations of the human mind but products of historical human activity" (Rubin, 1975, 159 ff). This system of meanings is connected to social values and hierarchies which are connected to the political and economic factors of each society which thus maintains the organization of social inequality. Hence de Lauretis's configuration that "gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes" (5). For De Lauretis the sex-gender system is both

a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society. If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for
someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. (1987, 5)

Kate Bornstein investigates notions of the body as an historical idea and gender based on the rigid conceptual opposition of two biological sexes by invoking the historical character of Herculine Barbin in her play Hidden: A Gender (1994). The play takes the form of a television talk show or traveling medicine show, with the character Doc Grinder (a talk show host type or medicine side-show barker) taking the position of authority, intervening/interacting with the character Herman, a man who believes he is a woman (who is sexually attracted to women) and commenting upon Herculine Barbin’s monologues. Barbin was raised and lived as a female in France in the last half of the nineteenth century. Eventually, in her early twenties, she discovered to her surprise that she was a biological male. Confining the character to one third of the stage, Bornstein has Barbin perform in a fourth wall tradition, creating the effect of someone on display. Barbin reflects on the appropriate feminine qualities that belong to women and is in conflict with her deep seated desire to pursue knowledge and read. She is confused by her sexual attraction to other women. Gender is connected in the play’s world of Herculine with the historical belief system that the pursuit of knowledge is an inherently male trait; her proclivity towards reading as a girl is cited by a doctor as one of the reasons for her “change” while it simultaneously evokes the notion that she was inherently male. She
also has a sexual preference for females, apparently linking her "natural" sexual tendencies to her "true" biologically male body. The changing body, however, creates an unstable referent for the category of "sex". As an unstable referent, the sexed body cannot serve gender "appropriately." Additionally, no matter how inherent these traits appear to be, the "assumption of the new meaning effects" confounds the role/meanings she has been playing/assuming her entire life.

Herculine: Oh, no-no no no no no I am a woman. I am sensible I am charming I am literate I am happy I am what men are not. Men are busy — I am to be idle. Men are rough — I am to be gentle. Men are strong — I am to be frail. Men are rational — I am rational. God help me I must be a man. . . . I have no uterus? What in heaven's name is a uterus?

Barbin’s questions and rationalizations as to her gender revolve around historical concepts of gender. Her status as a man for the doctor is based on her lack of a uterus (biology). Barbin’s “rationality,” a male trait, confirms the prognosis. Gender and sex are inextricably bound.

Herculine: . . . . According to Dr. Tardieu, I am a man chiefly because I cannot bear children. The mysterious uterus is present nowhere in my body. According to the Doctor, it was all the reading I did
as a child that caused my uterus to vanish and my, um, man part to begin to grow. . . . Too much knowledge is incompatible with the innocence which is women’s nature. It’s why I’ve loved women so intensely, and we both know how unnatural it is for two women to love one another as we have done. The doctor . . . says I am evolving from a lower life form to a higher one. That I shall soon be able to enjoy power, knowledge, and more women than I could ever imagine. Once my man-part grows in. He said I must practice my manhood rigorously . . . (197).

Bornstein’s Herculine Barbin is a historical and contemporary amalgam of assumptions about the body, gender, sex and sexuality which are redressed in contemporary theory, where “the existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings” (Butler 1990b, 271). Bodily existence and the meanings that bodily existence assumes through lived experience are reconceived into a notion that “the body is ‘an historical idea’ rather than ‘a natural species’” and that as an historical idea, “the body is a set of possibilities to be continually realized” (Butler 1990b, 271-272).12 Simone de Beauvoir makes a similar assertion that “‘woman,’ and by extension, any gender, is an historical situation rather than a natural fact”.13
Kate Bornstein’s book *Gender Outlaws: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994) reveals that she used to be a male spokesperson for Scientology and became an S/M lesbian transsexual (has undergone genital surgery). Her performances on stage confound notions of sexual difference and unsettle the idea of the “true body” with respect to ideas of the natural. “Becoming a woman,” in Bornstein’s case, includes literal and discursive significance. Jill Dolan has said “Watching her perform, I was unsettled by my awareness that Bornstein has no neutral body, that even her biology is not immutable but constructed. Is this the death of character? Where is the truth in this experience” (Dolan 1996, 104)?

Becoming a woman, compelling the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ inducing the body to become a cultural sign as a sustained and repeated corporeal project takes place under duress with the threat of punitive consequences for not performing gender “correctly.” In an interview with Shannon Bell, Bornstein likens gender to a “cult”:

Membership in gender is not based on informed consent. There is no way out without being ridiculed and harassed. There is peer pressure that is being brought to bear on everyone in this cult. There is no humor about gender. The only humour is from the people who transgress gender. (Bell, 111-112)

The duress of gender performance is linked to the commonalties and distinctions between gender as a type of theatrical performance and gender performativity. Butler notes that although theatrical performances “can meet
with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions” (278). Her example is the sight of a transvestite onstage who “can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence” (278). At stake are ideas of proximity and identification. The strict lines drawn between “real life” and “the play” or “an act” negotiates a response that can range from fear to pleasure, “on the street or the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality . . .” (1990b, 278). Hence, Butler moves from the notion of gender performance as a sustained and repeated “project” to “strategy” because “gender is a project which has cultural survival at its end” (273). Theatrical and film conventions’ proximity, however, do not necessarily provide immunity from censure, rage or violence. Gender performances within the film and theatrical conventions which challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality have often met with hostility, as Mae West’s banned camp plays exemplify.

West’s plays, Sex (1926) and The Drag (1927), are illustrations of the type of work that bridges censure in terms of gender in real life, gender on stage and the range of inappropriate performances for gender and sexuality, moving “strategies for survival” into a mode of camp that likewise incorporates notions of strategies for survival into its practice.

Mae West’s career as an actor and playwright spans Burlesque, Vaudeville, Broadway to Hollywood and is marked by her own status as a
cultural icon framed by her swivel-hipped persona and famous drawl. Her stage career climaxed in the 1920s with two scandalous plays about a sexual underworld which included homosexuality and prostitution. Evidence from Billboard suggests that in 1926, at age thirty-two, West had spent twenty five years in popular theatre, having just appeared (1922-1925) on the Mutual Burlesque Wheel (or Circuit) (Tuska 1973, 30-31). The Mutual Wheel was considered to be a very rough form of burlesque which included striptease performances in revues such as Playmates, Girls from the Follies, Round the Town, Snap it Up, and French Models, which were said to approach pornography (Hamilton 1995, 47). Her move to Broadway was a giant leap, from what was conceived of as illegitimate theatre to legitimate theatre. Her work, however, retained a certain marginal sensibility gleaned from her previous milieu.

Sex\textsuperscript{14} and The Drag\textsuperscript{15} provide examples of types of gender performances which are met with outrage. They are significant in terms of the type of censure they attracted because they combine several types of improper performances, illustrating that performance is not limited to homosexuality for “deviant” sexuality and gender to run amok and be censured. I will show further on in this chapter the significance of sexuality in relation to normative gender performance, that is, that gender performance as a “strategy for survival” includes the notion of mandatory heterosexuality. West’s plays show that heterosexuality becomes unhinged within the context of certain camp texts, fuelling the “outrage” around these performances.
Improper performances in West’s plays include gender and sexual behaviour for women in the form of the abrasive and self-willed harlot, improper sexual behaviour for heterosexual women in the form of a wealthy married woman’s promiscuity, improper gender behaviour for men in the form of the drag queen, and improper sexual behaviour in the form of open homosexuality. Significantly, West’s plays are connected to the camp fascination with sexual identity and the range of possibilities for identity categories, “where identity may be framed upon sexuality, but sexuality plays across a multitude of passions” (Schlissel, 28).

The plot of Sex involves a prostitute from Montréal, Margy LaMont, who rescues a promiscuous society woman from death whereupon the woman, wanting to protect her own reputation, charges her with assault. Margy LaMont decides to follow the fleet to Trinidad, and falls in love with a rich young man (whose mother happens to be the very society lady with whom she had quarreled) while her true sweetheart, a sailor with good intentions, follows her. Sex was bold for its time in its unsubtle critique of “respectable” women. Accusing Clara, the society woman, of being a closet whore Margy says: “You’ve got the kind of stuff in you that makes women of my type. . . . The only difference between us is that you could afford to give it away” (West, 74).

The plot of The Drag involves the closeted gay son of a wealthy Judge who has married an “innocent” woman as a “cloak” to pacify his father’s desire that he should marry. Wealth and corruption are allies in both plays
and although both are subtitled "Comedies," a serious critical tone is found in references to drug abuse, suicide, police brutality and life on the streets.\textsuperscript{16} The Drag unapologetically advocates acceptance for homosexuals, which is voiced through the straight character of the Doctor, whose daughter, unbeknownst to him, has married a gay man. In a lengthy and passionate debate about "misfits of nature" with the Judge, he says:

DOCTOR: You law-makers. You think that four stone walls and a barred window will cure everything or anything. But you still endeavor by law to force a man born with inverted sexual desires, born to make his way in the world with millions of human beings radically different than he is, to become something which his soul will not permit him to become. (108)

West expands the plea for acceptance to include other marginal sub-cultures, including prostitution:

JUDGE: The law has forced this vice into a corner, just as it has forced prostitution into shady byways.

DOCTOR: Granted the law has done just that, but what specific good has it done? Has the law made secret prostitution unprofitable...? Are we... going to declare as outcast and criminal these unfortunates
who through no fault of their own have been born with instincts and desires different from ours...? Or are we going to force them into secrecy and shame, for being what they cannot help being, by branding them as criminals and so lead them into the depths of misery and suicide? (108)

Deviant sexuality (including examples such as straight women who stray from a moral path into adultery or promiscuity and prostitution) usually in conflict with corrective notions of gender (which say that women are not supposed to behave this way), is often met with censure and threat. The opposition to Mae West's plays is indicative of early examples of this type of corrective censure. On February 9, 1927 the police raided Sex although it had been running for almost a year and had been seen by more than 325,000 persons. The court would dismiss the charges if the play would close, which was refused by the parties involved, prompting an obscenity trial. The writer, producer, actors and theatre-owner were charged with producing "an obscene, indecent, immoral and impure drama" the content of which was "wicked, lewd, scandalous, bawdy, obscene, indecent, infamous, immoral and impure," which contributed to "the corruption of the morals of youth and other[s]...[and] create in their minds inordinate and lustful desires, unlawfully, wickedly and scandalously."17 West and the other principals were found guilty. She was fined and sentenced to 10 days on Welfare Island. Commenting upon her conviction, West said: "Considering what Sex got me,
a few days in the pen 'n' a $500 fine ain't too bad a deal" (16). The fact that West's plays are not corrective in any way, that is, they do not inscribe devices to either punish the characters who deviate from normative gender or sexuality or morally shame them, is part of the outrage.

Historical ideas of realism found in corrective discourses for moral fiction find their counterpoint in camp practice. Lillian Hellman's play The Children's Hour (1934) is an example of what is meant by corrective moral fiction. Hellman uses the traditional realistic linear narrative form. Her subject matter is the exposition of a 'lie.' Unlike Sky Gilbert's play where the 'lie' is used in a self-reflexive fashion, the social construction of the natural is maintained by using lesbianism as the impetus for this lie in Hellman's work. The Children's Hour can avoid meeting with political censorship or scathing criticism because the characters are censored and punished within the play's context. Two female teachers are accused of being lesbians by a child who fabricates the charge. Both women lose their positions as teachers and are ostracized from the community. It is revealed that one of the women, Martha, does have "feelings" for the other woman. Martha kills herself. While portraying her characters sympathetically, in no way does Hellman or the form encourage or provide alternative choices, meanings or situations in which the characters might triumph over their prescribed situation. Hellman's play perpetuates the prescription for deviant women. The "punitive and regulatory social conventions" Butler applies to non-theatrical contexts are repeated within the play. The play itself participates in this
convention by its passive, unquestioning position. Immediately before she kills herself Martha says:

   Tomorrow? That’s a funny word. Karen, we would have to invent a new language, as children do, without words like tomorrow. (90)

The language of camp can be regarded as an answer, a strategy for the survival of corrective discourses such as Hellman’s, where self-sacrifice is the norm for those who do not conform to normative gender and sexuality standards. Jack Babuscio, in his essay “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” says that “camp advocates the dissolution of hard and inflexible moral rules. . . . Its viewpoint suggests detachment from conventional standards” (1977, 42). Similarly, Case says that camp “eradicates the ruling powers of heterosexist realist modes” (1989, 287).

West’s plays are examples which function within camp’s flexible moral paradigm in terms of their portrayal of gender and sexuality. _Sex_ deals with a prostitute not so much with a heart of gold as with an iron will and chutzpah. Writing in the traditionally formulaic and familiar melodramatic genre, West subverts the traditional terminal fate for the fallen woman by ending the play with her brassy prostitute character Margy LaMont moving to Australia to marry her sailor sweetheart as opposed to the mandatory death sentence or totalizing self-sacrifice of the genre. In a move which counters the familiar expectations of the melodrama, West restructures the original finale18 which finds Margy LaMont sacrificing the love of a rich man she has fallen in love with to return to the brothel in Montréal. West moves her
character’s actions into the realm of camp by empowering the harlot through humour, critique and triumph. In West’s play, Margy sacrifices the rich man but finds happiness with the sailor who stood by her through it all:

MARGY: Mrs. Stanton I’m giving you back your boy. I’m sure you’ll teach him to forgive me.

CLARA: But you are not going back to that life?

MARGY: No, I’m going straight–to Australia. *(Holds out hand to GREGG.)*

*FINAL CURTAIN*

The twist at the end of West’s re-vamped production, marriage and a new life, which traditionally belongs to the genre of Comedy, can be read as a comment upon the corrective discourses of moral fiction. Her detachment from conventional standards places her well within the framework of camp practice.

**Strategies for Survival and Camp**

Performing one’s gender prescriptively is a “strategy for survival” because the conflation of sex, gender and sexuality mandates a natural and heterosexual performance for being female and male. Where identity is regarded as “an effect of discursive practices” gender identity is construed as a relationship among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire, it is “the effect of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality”
(Butler 1990a, 18). For example, Laurie Schulze's work on female bodybuilders indicates that because these women's bodies are so "different" and "strange" they are often accused of looking "just like men" or as "trying to be men" and they are often labeled lesbian. Bodybuilders and lesbians both "disturb patriarchy and heterosexism" drawing "very similar responses from dominant culture. . . . [L]eads were and are often charged with 'not being real women,' and simultaneously 'accused of wanting to be men'" (1990, 73). Often, dominant culture's reaction to female bodybuilders in popular discourse is to affix female bodybuilders to heterosexuality by coding the body through femininity by covering the hyperbolic musculature with a skimpy bikini, makeup and styled or long hair in attempt to recuperate the bodybuilder into appropriate sexuality through her gender (68). Because sexuality is often conflated with gender, which encompasses mandatory heterosexuality for males and females, if one does not perform gender normatively one's sexuality is likewise suspect. Kate Bornstein, a critic who does not identify with being male or female, articulates the complex relationship between gender and mandatory heterosexuality:

The definition of gender in this culture includes the mandate of heterosexuality. To be a woman means to love men, to be a man means to love women. So in fact, every lesbian and every gay man is transgressing gender roles and gender rules. Whereas not all transgendered people are lesbian and gay, all lesbians and gays are transgendered. (Bell 1993, 116)
Bornstein's comment cleverly articulates the prescriptions for gender which are tied to normative sexuality and illustrates why, in the popular imagination, the appearance of persons whose gender is “off” destabilizes their connection to heterosexuality.

The notion of gender performance as a strategy with cultural survival at its end is echoed in the discourses surrounding the history of camp and signals an important intersection between the two. Esther Newton in *Mother Camp* says that “camp is a strategy for a situation” (1972, 105). Connected with the political activism/arena of the post Stonewall (1969) gay liberation movement, camp has been cited as a language and strategy for survival for homosexuals and transgendered persons. As examples throughout this thesis will show, camp challenges normative notions of sexuality and gender by refuting the qualities associated with gender and sexuality as natural in discourses and performance practices which render these notions hyperbolic. Camp uses notions about being construed as outside (never completely though: camp depends on the interplay, exchange and availability of dominant discourse’s meanings) of dominant culture’s prescriptions and does not rely upon maintaining the dominant codes for gender and sexuality to survive. Camp takes up the cues for difference (which Butler shows is strategically avoided in gender by reiterating normative cues) and strategically incorporates difference into a re-fashioned sensibility which ultimately refers back to Butler’s reiterative strategy. For Butler the strategy for survival is found in the reiteration of the norms for gender, the compulsion to repeat
the norms to survive (in) culture. Camp’s strategy repeats the norms in gender but renders that repetition hyperbolic. In “Closet Plays: An Exclusive Dramaturgy At Work,” (1989) Sky Gilbert says that

camp is a way of looking at the world. It has its own language and its own rules. Because gay men have been excluded from straight society, because they have been ridiculed and ostracized, they have developed a special sense of humour, which is ultimately a way of communicating as well as a form of self-protection. (56)

Importantly, Gilbert’s observation can be expanded to include other forms of exclusion from “straight” society as exemplified by the inappropriate performances in Mae West’s plays and the reaction to them. Bornstein calls these excluded or marginal identities “outlaws:”

As outlaws – lesbians, gay men, transgendered, bisexual, or as S/M players – we lampoon the images of the dominant (i.e., heterosexual) culture. We blend, fold, and mutilate popular forms and genres and claim them for ourselves. . . . Camp, drag, and dyke noire drama are all examples of this mélange of barbed comedy. (Bornstein, 159)

Artifice: Seriously Camp

Camp’s artifice, combined with other components of camp such as incongruity, theatricality and humour, transforms dominant cultural
perceptions about normative gender and sexuality. Newton maintains that "incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy" (1972, 106). Michael Bronski in Culture Clash: The Making of a Gay Sensibility (1984) regards camp as the "re-imagining of the material world into ways and forms which transform and comment upon the original. It changes the natural and normal into style and artifice" (4). For example, The Drag brings open homosexuality onto the stage in spectacle – the first scene of the final act replicates a drag ball, and situates itself firmly within camp's realm in terms of theatricality, incongruity and humour. The representation of characters who unabashedly banter in counter-culture vernacular, about "rough trade," powder puffs, and what to wear to the drag ball is unique.

DUCHESS: Oh, my goodness. I've got the most gorgeous new drag. Black satin, very tight, with a long train of rhinestones.

CLEM: Wait until you see the creation I'm wearing, dearie. Virginal white, no back, with oceans of this and oceans of that, trimmed with excitement in front. You know I'm more the flapper type, not so much like a canal boat.

DUCHESS: Creation – ha! That old thing. I knew it three years ago. Oh, Annie. (118-19)

While this type of banter runs throughout the play between the drag queens, the tone set here is not limited to the drag queens. West's camp
humour comes through in a dialogue about what to wear, between the innocent young Clair, who is about to be escorted to the Opera by a man who is not her husband, and Marion, her friend. The common (and apparently incongruous) references in both dialogues to the "white dress" become heightened. Clothing, in camp's fashion, becomes a code in both instances:

MARION: What are you going to wear?
CLAIR: I have that pretty black chiffon and I have a new white gown you haven't seen.
MARION: Wear the white one. It reminds me of purity, so becoming to one when one's not out with one's husband.
CLAIR: Marion, you're so clever, but just what do you mean by that?
MARION: Nothing, dear. (126)

This dialogue in The Drag also illustrates the transformation of the natural and normal into style and artifice. Where the drag queens seemed to make the natural idea about a dress unnatural, in the normative context between the two women the dress is also "unnatural." Mirroring the drag queens, West creates a reversal in the scene between Marion and Clair. The dress is distinguished from a notion of natural (women) and unnatural (drag queens) by playing upon the significations of the dress. In terms of gender, camp, at the level of artifice becomes self-reflexive; artifice comments upon the "original," on the presumed natural which is considered, similarly, a
construction. Camp's artifice refuses the search for the origins of gender, "the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view" (Butler 1990a, viii).

Susan Sontag relates that camp "is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed the essence of camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (1966, 278). Sontag does not question origins or sexual difference in her essay, the implication being that there is something natural to gender which camp makes unnatural. Sontag does, however, describe the seriousness of camp as a strategy which has often been troubled by its ties to artifice. Artifice, a major component of camp associated with style, retains significant implications for how camp is received. Sontag says that

many examples of camp are things which, from a serious point of view, are either bad art or kitsch. Not all, though. Not only is camp not necessarily bad art, but some art which can be approached as camp (example: the major films of Louis Feuillade) merits the most serious attention. (278)

Bronski recounts that camp is more than simply bad art or kitsch, that camp has roots in form and sensibility: "the word camp and what it denotes have become so overpopularized that it has lost some of its specific meaning and history" (42).
Artifice in camp is a strategy which fights artifice-in-the-guise-of-nature. Because it is often assumed that artifice means superficial, camp is often dismissed as superficial. When camp is associated with a gay sensibility that assumption is often reinforced. Camp is “a sensibility that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous – these are grave matters. Most people think of sensibility or taste as the realm of purely subjective preferences, those mysterious attractions, mainly sensual, that have not been brought under the sovereignty of reason” (Sontag, 276). Sky Gilbert brings this into the context of gay male camp culture,

[Great gay artists are dismissed as superficial quite often because of their association with the ‘gay’ lifestyle. . . . [T]o be gay is seen as being superficial by the predominantly straight culture . . . the particular mode of viewing the world and dealing with life – ‘camp’ – that has grown out of gay culture is also seen as being without depth. (1989, 57)

The connection between artifice and the superficial makes its way into the dismissive discourses on camp in feminist theory, as articulated by Dolan, “Female impersonation . . . is usually filtered through the camp sensibility, which removes it from the realm of serious gender play and deconstruction” (1984, 5).
Communicating Camp

Communication and self-protection, underlying strategies of gender and camp, become integrated into a manner of expressing an inexpressible reality through artifice, a reality that has been oppressed by the dominant culture's language. Case says "This artifice, as artifice, works to defeat the reign of realism as well as to situate camp discourse within the category of what can be said (or seen)" (1989, 287). The notion of language and transformation is implicated in discourses surrounding camp's artifice:

Camp was and is a way for gay men to re-imagine the world around them. It exaggerates and therefore diffuses real threats. If proscribed gender roles leave no room for homosexuals, they can easily be ridiculed: the homosexual fondness for such sexual/gender stereotypes as Mae West, Hedy Lamarr, or Victor Mature come from the fact that they are parodies (in West's case intentional) of what is thought to be normal. (Bronski 1984, 42)

The self-reflexivity of a discourse which uses artifice against artifice is found in camp's language which confounds notions of "the truth" and "the lie." Critics assert that the rules used for validating the difference between real/true and unreal/false break down: "The controlling agents of the status quo may know the power of lies; dissident subcultures, however, are closer to knowing their value."20 Lillian Schlissel comments about Mae West's plays that, "In the strange ethical architecture of the gay plays . . . all the 'queers' are the world's innocents. They do not lie about who they are. Their fantastic
gowns and ‘disguises’ confirm their identity. The ‘straight’ world is disguised and the gay world is ‘straight’” (1997, 27). “The language of camp humour is terribly serious,” the character Marlene in Sky Gilbert’s Drag Queens on Trial says, “when a drag queen lies, she tells the truth.”

Traditional gender roles or normative gender assignments become an inevitable project for theatricalization in camp performance. The “lie” as it is manifest in gender and realism is often met with the counter-strategy of cross-gender-casting, which alone does not signal a camp performance, but which does signal a reconfiguration of gender roles. How cross-gender-casting is manifest is what makes camp, camp. For example, the theatricalization of gender in Gilbert’s Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home takes place within the arena of cross-casting several roles. All roles are played by males, both female and male roles, except for the daughter Tina who is played by a female. The two female characters in the play who are cross-gender-cast are Lola Starr and Minoola Grump, who is the vicious voice of morality in the play. Tina, the daughter, is played by a woman. Tina rejects the role of the feminine daughter but her appearance as a female playing a female in a play where all of the other female parts are played by men is significant. It simultaneously resonates with the woman playing a woman as natural, reflecting some essential nature of woman on stage, and it releases her from the male-identified versions of females playing “themselves.” Tina rejects the qualities her male-identified mother holds for herself and her daughter. The idea of male-identification is heightened by her mother being played by a male,
Gilbert in this early production. The character's relationships to one another, however, tell more of a story than any "truth" about the performer's gender. If it is assumed that expressivity and cross-dressing are enough to destabilize normative notions of gender, then camp suggests this is not enough by playing upon these assumptions. Characters comment upon each other's styles and behaviour. And although Tina is played by a female, supposedly her "true" gender, she resonates with different meanings because of her relationship with Lola:

TINA: If you're going to live outside society then you REALLY have to do it all the way. Besides, it's society that's made those rules that turned you into this passive woman who accepts that a man has the right to beat on you. And if you don't kill him he'll go on to beat on other women, women who are anaesthetized by society's double standard.

LOLA: Tina, your arguments are so terribly eloquent for one so young and living in the 1950's. (72)

Tina is not the only critical voice in the play. The constant commentary/critique made bold through camp humour is vocalized by the drag queen, Lola, self-reflexively. It is her daughter, played by a female, who is able to "advise" outside the temporal constraints (1950s vs. 1980s) of the play
and it is the drag queen who comments upon the daughter's role. The levels and interplay of language and meaning are woven throughout the play not too subtly. It is this larger than life exposition and underlying critique that resonates with camp style.

Tina's naturalized status as being "really" a female is, in relation to the mother, critical — her rejection of the feminine qualities imposed upon her by her mother, as a female on stage, exemplifies a critique of normative feminine qualities for girls — and is, however, simultaneously problematic. Tina's desire to be a prison matron when she grows up, a campy goal for a tomboy daughter, is a blatant and excessive cue to her sexuality. So, brought over from the level of naturalized gender without having her cross-gender-cast, she is brought back to inhabiting a position fixed in the conflation of gender and sexuality. She does not perform her gender prescriptively, she is a tomboy, which signals she is a lesbian. The conflation is not destabilized but is reinforced. She is somewhat liberated from gender and heterosexuality and not free from the stereotype of lesbianism which she perpetuates. And while "type" is inherent to camp, there is no subversion of the type in this instance. As I will explore more fully in chapter two, drag and camp play upon normative notions of "type." Tina's sexual identity in this play recuperaes the normative notions associated with the prison-matron-lesbian stereotype. If a male were to play Tina and assume the "masco" garb attributed to masculinity while playing a lesbian, would there be a case for a subversive critique of the macho type or butch-lesbian stereotype? If she were played as a
feminine little girl, who loved dresses and still wanted to be a prison matron, could this work? Perhaps Tina’s role could be re-viewed as donning the drag of sexuality (the role of the butch) through her stereotyping. These questions involve a more complex layering, moving cross-dressing into the realm of drag and beyond fixed positions such as Tina’s in this play.

Wallace says,

Lola Starr works as a creative paradigm of the new gay consciousness, one in which the strategies of irony, fantasy and ridicule—the components of “camp”—are used to create a self-referential “travesty” of traditional values in which the self-creation of the cross-dressed subject is the central theme. Indeed, the play offers a clever example of Week’s assertion that “sexual identity, at least in the lesbian and gay subcultures of the West, has broken free from gender identity” (9).

Wallace’s statement cannot include Tina, the lesbian, because she does not cross-dress. That is, her rejection of the feminine garb her mother wants her to wear and the more “comfortable” clothing she opts for, does not count as cross-dressing and she is made theoretically invisible. It is impossible to read camp outside of cross-dressing in this instance. What position does Tina occupy in terms of camp, self-creation or within the “creative paradigm of the new gay consciousness” if she does not cross-dress? The “lesbian subculture” referred to by Weeks is obscured by Wallace’s “gay consciousness” which subsumes the lesbian identity into that of her male gay counterparts. In
chapter three, I will explore the potential for characters like Tina, played by females, to be camp.

Conclusion

Camp and gender intersect at important cross-roads. Both are "strategies for survival" and camp, like certain critical investigations into gender, conceives the body as "a set of possibilities." Performance metaphors often emphasize the "real" by stressing the "performed." The move away from essentialist identity categories into material and historical contexts and configurations is in keeping with camp's rejection of normative prescriptions for gender and sexuality which are often embedded in texts which attempt to hold up a mirror to some inherent truth about those categories. In cross-dressing or cross-gender-casting a message of "the true body beneath" the clothes reverts to what might be construed as what is "real" about that body. Camp practice signifies the body as "set of possibilities" by repeating the symbolic system of meanings created around and by gender, while foregrounding those meanings simultaneously.

In this chapter, I regarded the implications for the metaphors surrounding gender and touched upon the notion that cross-dressing is imbricated in certain essentialist assumptions related to sexual difference. The following chapter will investigate drag and move into a notion of "play" in the place of "performance" where drag and camp effectively play upon the norms of gender performativity which are also the resources for resistance.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


2 Examples of these citations are explored in chapter three, "Female Camp."

3 See Lois McNay, p.18, for further commentary.

4 Dolan, 9. Also see de Lauretis (1987) and Butler (1990a, 1990b).

5 Bornstein 1994, 147.

6 Catwoman's costume in *Batman Returns* is often referred to as a second skin. See final chapter for an in-depth analysis.

7 For example, Michael Dorsey's character in the film *Tootsie*. See chapter two for an extensive analysis.

8 Sky Gilbert's play, *Lola Starr Builds Her Dream Home*, premiered at the Edmonton Fringe Festival on August 18, 1988 and was directed by Edward Roy and Sky Gilbert. The show was remounted as the inaugural production of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's 1988-89 season.

9 This claim and the following career summary has been assembled from various publicity materials and playbills from Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. Gilbert's plays have been produced in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington DC, Houston, Phoenix, Vancouver and Montreal. Writer and director of his own plays *Pasolini/Pelosi, Play Murder* (Blizzard Publishing, 1994), *The Dressing Gown* (Playwrights' Union, 1989), *Drag Queens on Trial, Ban This Show* and *Capote at Yaddo* (Coach House Press), Gilbert received the Pauline McGibbon Award in 1985, and then directed the musical *Anything Goes* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* at the Shaw Festival in 1987. In 1990 he won a Dora Award for Best New Play for *The Whore's Revenge*, and in 1991 his play *Suzie Goo: Private Secretary* won a Dora for Best Production. In 1995, Sky Gilbert directed a remount of John Moore's *The Eric Lindros Trial* to wide acclaim. This *Unknown Flesh: Selected Plays by Sky Gilbert* was published in
the fall of 1995 by Coach House Press and Painted, Tainted, Sainted, his collection of drag plays was published by Playwright's Canada Press in 1996.


Further information in this area can be found in Kuhn's (1988) insightful investigation into gender performance and women's bodybuilding, referred to as "body drag" by Kuhn and Laurie Schulze in her essay "On the Muscle" (1990).

The notion of "natural species" in relation to gender and camp is hyperbolized as "cross-species-dressing" in the final chapter of this thesis.


West rented a Broadway theatre and hired a director with money she received from two private backers to stage Sex, which she had written for herself to perform in. See Mary Hamilton's When I'm Bad I'm Better: Mae West, Sex and American Entertainment (1995) for a biographical history.

West did not appear in The Drag which played in preview performances in Connecticut and New Jersey in January 1927.

The Drag was an answer, in part, to the lauded corrective tone of a play about an affair between two women running on Broadway called The Captive (Arthur Hornblower's translation of Edouard Bourdet's French play La Prisonnière: pièce en trois actes, Paris Librarie Théatrale, 1926) of which its star, Helen Menken, said it would provide good instruction for college women regarding the avoidance of perversion. See the introduction to Lillian Schlissel's Three Plays by Mae West (1997, 11).

From the grand jury indictment document, Municipal Archives of the City of New York, case #168495. A collection of these original documents is reproduced in Schlissel's book.
18 The original version of *Sex* was written by Jack Byrne and called *Following the Fleet* (Schlissel, 6).


20 From the newspaper *Fag Rag* quoted in Bronski, 1984, 41.

CHAPTER II

Drag: An Elementary Fabric of Camp

Having considered notions of “theatrical performance” as a metaphor for the constitution and manifestation of gender, this chapter introduces the idea that gender play more aptly describes the function of drag and camp than gender performance.

Chapter one introduced the notion that cross-dressing, the traditional exchange of women’s and men’s clothing onto the bodies of the opposite sex, is frequently based on an essentialist position or expressive model; that is, that by dressing as the opposite sex the true body beneath signals a correct gender in inappropriate dress. That original interior essence, conceived of as inherent femininity or masculinity, bound up with heterosexuality, when crossed, is believed to subvert gender and heterosexual sexuality by expressing what is perceived to be its opposite. I will now explore how conventional cross-dressing does not make for a camp performance but is tied to gender binaries and is more closely related to parodic performance practices which do not subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality but which often reinscribe them. This chapter will show that while drag makes use of cross-dressing, cross-dressing alone does not signal drag. Removed from the arena of cross-dressing, drag entails notions of layering and combining. This opens up the possibilities for the proliferation of meanings which challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality.
I look at the notion of gender performance in drag and camp as "play" in which performance is aligned with gender play, a play upon the norms which are the resources for resistance and which comprise gender performativity. Examples are taken from Keith Cole's film Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman (Erwin Abesamis, 1997) and from the performances of k.d. lang, including her appearance in the film Salmonberries (Percy Adlon, 1991). Gender play is often found in drag and camp texts which repeat gender performance or "retell well-known stories" (de Lauretis 1986, 11), destabilizing myths of origin and notions of coherent and expressive identities, where the body becomes a "set of possibilities."

It is misleading, however, to imagine that dressing up a story differently, re-telling well-known stories, is anything but a wolf in sheep's clothing (expressivity intended), in certain cases. That is, just as I have explored cross-dressing's problematic potential to serve a new way of "telling" gender, telling gender stories differently must in some way have an appropriately resonant form to effect a destabilization of gender.

I will look at two Hollywood films which tell familiar stories about gender, and which present examples where the attempt to play with gender does not alter but reinscribes normative notions of gender. By examining films which "fail" in terms of a camp effect (which I am defining here as an effect which challenges conventional notions of gender and sexuality) it is possible to see where and why camp and drag do work. Tootsie (Sydney Pollack, 1982) for example, presents key examples of expressivity, cross-
dressing, male-female binaries, and mandatory heterosexuality, situating the spectator firmly within a normative paradigm by appealing to a sympathy for the crossed-dressed character’s various dilemmas. How can our crossed-dressed hero get the girl, in a dress, and still be heterosexual? Interestingly, both films use unconventional gender behaviour as a central obstacle to the boy-gets-girl genre.

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar (Beeban Kidron, 1995) is a good example of a film that appropriates the codes for drag and camp but is limited to a parody of their styles/significations. Casting well-known Hollywood stars as drag queens resonates with the idea of “real” men beneath the feminine apparel. Normative sexuality is reinscribed by calling the drag queens “angels” and enabling the “real girl” in the film to get the “straight boy.” To repeat gender subversively, the form and content will have to challenge and explode these normative notions.

Drag Plays with Cross-Dressing; Cross-Dressing is not Drag

Conventional cross-dressing attempts to complete the transition from male to female or female to male in a unified and seamless fashion. For critics such as Chuck Kleinhans, drag functions as a form of gender parody expressing what he perceives to be one of “high camp’s” aims for “the seamless illusion of female impersonation” (1994, 189). While his investigation centers primarily around a category he calls “low camp” which “celebrates bad taste and often intentionally offends aesthetic and social
sensibilities in order to make a statement," Kleinhans leaves drag as a form of gender parody dangling in critical ether. What is not explored in most of the literature in the field is that often the aim at seamlessness does not achieve its goal or conversely is not meant to. Cross-dressing implies the act of crossing over to something "other" than what one "truly" is. Drag is more complex and involves subtle variations on notions of incongruity and imperfection. The theoretical relevance for imperfection in cross-dressing and drag resonates with the poststructuralist concern with shifting identities and unstable referents. On the opposite side of the coin from ethnographic or sociological investigations which explore the "real lives" of its subjects, poststructuralism regards positions such as "identity" as unstable. Identity moves off a ground of experience-as-reality onto a model that is multiple, shifting and self-contradictory, "made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender race, and class ..." (de Lauretis 1986, 9).

Subsumed in origins, conventional parodic cross-dressing is based on making fun out of the original by attempting to pass as the original. Female impersonation is likewise often read as the aim to achieve seamless perfection where the impersonator attempts to come as close to looking like the "original" as possible. Examples of this type of female impersonation can be found in the performances of drag queens lip synching as their favorite star; Cher, Judy Garland, Liza Minnelli, Marilyn Monroe to name a few. The goal is not to fool the spectator into believing the performer is the star, but to
imitate the star believably. Another form of female impersonation attempts to "pass" where the attempt to look like Everywoman will convince or fool the spectator into believing the "false" gender of the impersonator. Often this attempt "fails" (the meanings of which will be further investigated in *Tootsie* and *To Wong Foo*). Then you have the intent to fail, constructing the image so that it does appear incongruous, where the aim is to destabilize the notion of seamlessness.

It is significant that for the seamless illusion of woman to work its magic, the referent for woman, upon which the imitation is based, must likewise be "believable" or conceived of as "true." It could be said that if the images of women upon which female impersonation are based are male-identified then it is only fitting that a male should inhabit his (the patriarchal) creation. This type of response would not take into consideration the unstable nature of the referent "woman" where the meanings for woman are in flux historically and culturally, the reproduction or imitations of which are thus likewise unstable, shifting and available for critical revision. Seamlessness seems then fraught with instability, where, on the one hand, the referent for the illusion cannot signify as true and is unstable, and on the other hand, the intent for seamless perfection appears to express a desire for accurate representation based on a secure referent. The failure to "pass" for instance, is usually recognized as an "inaccurate" copy of the original. Often drag contests, for example, give awards to those who come as close to looking like the "original" as possible. The documentary film *Paris Is Burning* (Jennie
Livingston, 1990) presents drag contests which are characterized by notions of "realness." Contest categories include, School, Town & Country, Executive Realness, Military and High Fashion Evening Wear to mention a few. The term "realness" is used by the contestants to indicate coming as close to the category definition as possible. The prize, in this case, is awarded for "accuracy." Failure, in relation to the notion of an inaccurate copy, depends on a notion of drag that does not work the way it is 'supposed to' — seamlessly. This notion of drag is closely aligned with cross-dressing. As I will proceed to show, drag is at its best and most challenging when it utilizes notions of imperfection to challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality.

New York drag performer and founding member of the radical gay theatre ensemble Bloolips, Lavinia, a.k.a. Vincent Meehan, explains that drag is not limited to a sartorial crossing over:

My goal is to make people feel comfortable about drag – not formal drag but theatrical suggestions, bits and pieces of garbage woven together to look right. In this definition of drag, appearance is all about illusion. Drag was never about female impersonation . . . I'm not trying to be a female, not at all.5

When "cross-dressing" is brought into the realm of drag there is not so much a crossing effect as a layering effect, an amalgamation of the codes by which the meanings of female and male, femininity and masculinity are interpreted. New York drag performer Mathu Anderson whose unique
performance art (with partner Zaldy Goco) can be seen in the fashion photography of Meisel, Watson, Elgort and Scavullo says, "I found my power in being androgynous, not in the sense of it being neutral but actively exhibiting both sides of male and female together, so borders were blurred." While Anderson's referents are still the binaries of male and female, the combination creates an active "blurring" or amalgamation of the meanings male and female "sides" have come to represent. The theatricality associated with camp is prominent in drag, where the goal is not limited to the imitative or seamless appearance of the opposite sex. Anderson explains,

We always approached it from a fashion point of view, looking at shape rather than the stereotypical things of what makes a woman a woman . . . I was looking for a character to hook into. . . . I don't think being a woman, being a female, is necessarily it. Rather, it's centered in the power of the icon, and people's need for images, strong images. Because drag is like sitting in a Sherman tank. It has power . . . That's where drag is going; that's where the best of drag has always been.

Moving drag off a model of male-female clothing exchange (cross-dressing), into one which includes clothing exchange or sartorial crossing, but is not limited to a literal translation or expressive model, drag takes the notion of sartorial incongruity onto a different playing field of meanings where glamour or garbage is woven into a heightened sense of playing with gender expectations and the meanings of identity. Identity is no longer
supposedly stabilized by the call for the true referent, the body, upon which or "in” which true gender is said to reside. Through gender play new stories are told “so as to inscribe into the picture of reality characters and events and resolutions that were previously invisible, untold, unspoken . . .” (de Lauretis 1986, 11).

The self-reflexive quality of drag performance, while not often theorized by the performers themselves, is very much a part of the sensibility of drag. Drag performer Lypsinka (John Eperson from Jackson, Mississippi) has been called "master of a thousand voices” for her extraordinary range of old movie dialogue and record albums (Chermayeff 1995, 74). Her productions have included a show called Ballet of the Dolls (1985), which parodies the ballet world and the camp classic film Valley of the Dolls (Mark Robson, 1967). Dial M for Model, inspired by the Millie the Model comic books, was performed at La Mama in New York where Lypsinka debuted in 1987 to sold out shows. In 1995 her show competed with the big budget Broadway musicals Angels in America and Kiss of the Spider Woman (Chermayeff, 81). She tours the United States and United Kingdom with her show. Lypsinka articulates her style of performance as a “self-reflective” commentary on drag:

[W]hat I do is . . . subversive . . . What I do is really a comment on drag performance. Call it postmodernist, I guess – though ironically. I started doing this self-critique without even knowing what the term meant. I intended that the name
Lypsinka be self-reflective but at the same time I didn’t know why.⁹

Lypsinka refers to her performance as “pastiche.”¹⁰ The critical significance of the parodic practice of pastiche is in its relation to “the original, the authentic, and the real” which are “themselves constituted as effects” (Butler, 1990a, 146). The laughter associated with the pastiche-effect is, Lypsinka and Butler agree, “subversive” (Butler, 146; Lypsinka in Chermayeff, 74): “[G]ender . . . is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler 1990a, 146-7).

Drag is concerned with incongruities which aggravate conceptions of wholeness and which mark resistance to fixed positions and self-identity. Drag repeats the process of identification with a fixed gender by appropriating gender in a form which transforms and liberates it by foregrounding the incongruity of the appropriation. The incongruity of the appropriation is not limited to crossing-over to the opposite sex. Mathu Anderson’s drag performance partner Zaldy Goco says “we’ve redefined the criteria for ourselves. We want to look like men. But men in full tie and corset. And it’s still drag.”¹¹ Anderson says, “Wanting to look like a man is just as big a joke as wanting to look like a woman. It’s just another set of rules to play with. Gender’s still the game.”¹²

Moving gender performance off a model of cross-dressing based on sexual difference and expressive models into the notion of “gender play”
includes notions of theatricality and the camp aspects of the theatrical such as costume, makeup, props and character. Gender play more aptly describes the function of drag and camp than gender performance where the idea of "theatrical performance" is a metaphor for the constitution and manifestation of gender identity. For performance as gender play, the performance is a play upon the norms which are the resources for resistance and which comprise gender performativity. Gender play repeats and destabilizes rigid notions of femininity and masculinity (using the norms as resources to forge resistance, subversion and displacement), usually regarded as specific to female and male bodies, where femininity and masculinity (defined traditionally as the "natural" expression of being female or male) are assumed to be essential to those bodies. Gender play is often found in drag and camp texts where myths of origin become hyperbolized self-reflexively:

As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they [parodic styles] imitate the myth of originality itself. In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction (Butler 1990a, 138).
A recent show at Toronto’s Fringe Festival (1998), *The Drag Queen That Time Forgot* (1998)\(^{13}\) by David Oiyé (director) and Gordon Mackeracher (performer) presents an example of gender play. Set as a one woman show, the main character is a drag performer called Gayle Warnings, who is backstage preparing to go onstage to perform as Judy Garland. Warnings dons a man’s jacket in Garland’s own crossed sartorial tradition of combining a man’s jacket with stockings and high heeled shoes. The drag queen confronts the audience’s expectations regarding the appropriate dress-code for a drag performer saying that she bets they thought she would pull out a frilly dress or shimmering sequined number (as opposed to a man’s jacket). The expectations we can assume Gayle Warnings is referring to are those that conform to the cross-dressing tradition of completing the unified and seamless transition from male to female by appropriating the clothing of the opposite sex. Appropriating the combined sartorial elements that Garland herself used shifts the layering effect onto a further playing field of signification regarding cross-dressing and drag. The man’s jacket which should signify “male” on the male performer’s body did not signify “appropriately” on the male performer’s body but referred back to Garland who herself was using the man’s jacket in an “inappropriate” or crossed manner. This type of gender play and drag performance plays upon notions of seamlessness, myths of origin and resists normative notions of femininity and masculinity to be found in male and female bodies which can be expressed by dressing up as the opposite sex.
Camp uses Parody; Parody is not Camp

Appropriation and transformation, the hallmarks of camp and drag, imply a relationship between imitation and an original and are connected to parody. The Oxford English Dictionary defines parody in the following way:

an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect.\textsuperscript{14}

The relation between parody and imitation in drag performance is complex because of the assumption of an original which can be imitated by appropriation. This conception itself contradicts notions of fluidity and rupture that define drag and camp. I am situating parody, in relation to camp and drag, outside the notion of an original and into a framework where the notion of an original is itself contested: "[t]he parody is of the very notion of an original" (Butler 1990a, 138). Where cross-dressing’s parodic emphasis is on the \textit{real} body beneath the clothes, the notion of an original, even at the level of the seamless impersonation of a star, is self-reflective in drag where a comment upon the original produces its own effects. The difference between conventional meanings of parody (OED) and the meanings of parody in the realm of drag and camp is significant:

[Gender parody] is a production which, in effect — that is, in its effect — postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation
deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities . . . (Butler 1990a, 138).

Importantly, notions of proliferation tied to expressive models such as cross-dressing do not undermine normative notions of gender identity or heterosexual presumption. Proliferation is opened up when removed from parody as imitative. In the context of drag which entails notions of layering and combining, proliferation opens up the possibilities for meanings which destabilize conventional notions of gender.

While drag parodies the notion of an original or primary gender identity, drag and cross dressing have often been cited as uncritically appropriating sex-role stereotypes. The argument for a more complex relationship between the “original” and the “imitation” must consider how the conflation of cross-dressing with drag and conventional parody (as imitative) with camp limits drag’s potential to illuminate that relationship beyond primary identification, or the original meanings accorded to gender. Expressive models of cross-dressing do parodically reinscribe traditional meanings accorded to gender by locating natural traits such as femininity and masculinity on the “wrong body.” An example of how the notion of an original and inherent masculinity or femininity is destabilized in gender play can be found in the hyperbolization and manifestation of those traits in the terms “butch” and “femme”. If femininity and masculinity are conceived as natural traits which belong to female and male bodies respectively, the
notions of femme and butch play upon those traits in a display of excess. To be femme is to play upon the cues for femininity, to be butch is to play upon the cues for masculinity; the comment is upon the original to produce its own effects. Butch and femme, however, often become referents themselves in drag, which can be played upon for a further layering effect. Camp and drag performances embrace cross-dressing into the fold, heightening the expectations and stereotypes so that while gender meanings “taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization” (Butler 1990a, 139).

I will use examples from the gender performances of singer, songwriter and actress k.d. lang to illustrate some of the notions I have described. There are many examples from k.d lang’s career in music videos, televised interviews, essays and articles and her performance in the film Salmonberries (1991) which exemplify gender play, self-reflexivity, fluidity and rupture that define drag and camp. I will examine how her body is an unstable signifier for gender, destabilizing the notion of the “true” body said to reside in gender beneath the clothes. Lang occupies a contested territory between culturally “appropriate” positions for femininity and masculinity, between theoretically “appropriate” positions for butch and femme and the critical relationship she has to the way she is perceived. The ideas inherent in conventional cross-dressing, where the referent is the true body beneath the clothes, become destabilized in relation to k.d. lang’s gender performance because of her
position in relation to femininity and masculinity, that is, her position as androgyne.

I am defining androgyny as a liminal site (a term which refers to a resistance to fixed positions, marked by a resistance to self-identity) which plays between prescriptions for femininity and masculinity, butch and femme. As a liminal site, androgyny simultaneously includes traditional gender traits (e.g. this woman is read as a woman) and excludes conventional gender traits (e.g. this woman is read as a woman who does not conform to her traditional gender assignment). Androgyny is an intersection which appropriates normative notions of gender, blending them in an unconventional manner and forming an amalgamation which, by virtue of the fact that the boundaries are usually considered mutually exclusive (e.g. the division of male and female, femininity and masculinity), uses the norms to resist them. I am not suggesting that these boundaries play out in binary opposition to one another; the proliferation of meanings enables the potential for further intersections or layering of meanings in relation to gender play.

Normative gender for women in terms of femininity in popular culture often has to negotiate "imperfections" when confronted with uncommon gender play (which itself suggests the inability of the normative gender paradigm to contain itself). Hegemonic strategies abound, as can be seen by lang's appearance on the cover of *Chatelaine*, a Canadian woman's magazine. lang describes an imagined reader of the magazine: "A 'Miss
Chatelaine' to me is the same thing as an ingenue. It’s an American woman who goes to Paris for the first time and feels very Continental. She’s a naive débutante” (Magnuson, 1992). As an androgyne, lang is an unconventional woman to appear on the cover of a magazine which embodies a “naive” and “débutante” aesthetic. Named Chatelaine’s Woman of the Year in January 1988, lang said,

It was quite a big step for them to put someone like me on the cover, because I’m not a stereotypical woman. . . . I think it’s really cool. . . . I think it’s great because they allowed me to be myself. The only unfortunate thing is that they airbrushed lipstick, but I guess that was their last laugh. (Robertson 1992, 85)

This Magazine commented, “(b)are lips on female singers seems to be too much of a challenge for some” (Robertson 1992, 85). lang is in critical relation with her position as androgynous woman versus débutante or Miss Chatelaine. This resonates theoretically with Trinh T. Minh-ha’s notion of “inappropriate/d others” which does not mean “not to be in relation with,” but rather “means to be in critical, deconstructive relationality – as the means of making a potent connection that exceeds domination” (1986-7). lang is aware that she in not “stereotypical” for her gender and of the “big step” challenges she poses for the perception of women in relation to femininity.

The cover of Chatelaine is a liminal site, where meanings of the term Woman (as a Miss Chatelaine) are contested. An amalgamation of the codes
on the cover becomes too challenging, and lipstick becomes the dominant weapon of choice to reassert, however unconvincingly, lang’s femininity.17

lang wrote a song, “Miss Chatelaine,” for her album entitled Ingenue in 1992 and made a music video. In the video lang is dressed in a glamorous ball gown as a femme, crossing over from androgyne to hyperbolic femme in female-female impersonator tradition. With the Chatelaine cover as a referent, the parodic recontextualization in the video including the hyperbolic femininity, takes on a camp tone. Over lang’s career, she has played with female-female drag and parodic recontextualization: “In one clip [lang is] sporting a chartreuse brocade suit an elderly lady might wear to a wedding. . . . For another song she turns up in a bouffant 1950’s hairdo and a matronly pink polyester dress” (Bennetts 1993, 98). In the “Miss Chatelaine” video lang croons in a heavily made up face, “I can’t explain why I’ve become Miss Chatelaine.” A Lawrence Welk ambience and nostalgia are triggered by the appearance of bubbles. The tension between her appearance as androgyne and her video appearance as femme is camp, and unlike the attempt to reassert some feminine value onto lang’s covertly airbrushed face, camp plays upon the normative cues for female gender, in gender play. The video and magazine cover both constitute lang as inappropriate/d other; however the magazine tries to reassert unstable boundaries by trying to naturalize lang’s appearance as feminine (adding lipstick to her photographed bare face) whereas the video plays upon the tension established between the boundaries of feminine, femme and androgyne by heightening feminine qualities self-
reflexively. Androgyny is the amalgamation of the boundaries of feminine, femme and butch referents in the video. A review in Interview which tries to liberate lang from the butch references that cannot hide beneath a ball gown into a feminine space, describes lang as “femme” and as “softer” in the video (Fuller 1992, 96-99). “That’s me,” says lang. “I wanted to expose the Lawrence Welk-induced feminine part of my personality” (98). The Lawrence Welk-induced feminine side is a campy and strategic reappropriation of femme codes, not something separate from her androgyny but part of it.

The conflation of signs, codes and configurations that pertain to lang as androgyne, is caught in a tension between her body and the prescriptions for signifying that body as female. The expectations for primary identification and original gender are juggled for critics such as Leslie Bennetts who describes her look at a concert:

Not that you’d necessarily know she’s a woman at first sight. Tall and broad-shouldered, wearing a black cutaway coat flecked with gold, black pants, and her favorite steel-toed black rubber shit-kicker work boots . . . she looks more like a cowboy. Her glossy dark hair is full but short, and when she tosses her head and strides across the stage on those long strong legs, you suddenly realize she’s moving with a kind of physical freedom you’ve never seen a female singer display before. (1993, 98)

Later in the article Bennetts reveals, “You can watch her for years and never even be aware she has breasts. She is as different from a female icon like Dolly
Parton as if she were *another species*" (emphasis mine, 98). The pejorative tone of Bennetts' description throughout the article gets caught between referents, those which signify lang's body as female, and those which refer to lang's unconventional appearance (clothing, gesture, manner) in relation to her body. It is possible here to see how, in popular culture, notions of the body expressing true gender circulate. Bennetts is increasingly mystified, in the article, by lang's body which confounds description in relation to her gender performance. lang is described in the same article which says one might never be aware she has breasts as displaying, after shedding her jacket at the concert performance, "a loose, flowing white blouse that drapes fluidly over her body, revealing the womanly fullness of her hips. . . . A black bra is just barely visible underneath" (144). The appearance of the body traditionally conflated with gender, cannot signify "appropriately" because lang's gender performance as androgyne does not resonate with that conflation. The womanly fullness of her hips becomes the unexpected whereas, according to the prescriptions for female gender, there should be no conflict. The sartorial black bra also hints at a femininity which is apparently contradictory to her "cowboy" image. lang has breasts and is considered, nonetheless, to be a different species from Dolly Parton who is herself constructed as excess in terms of large breasts and big hair, two major signifiers for femme performance. Traditional meanings accorded to gender are destabilized in a recontextualization of the referents of the female body. The contrasting referents, which circulate as part of lang's androgyny, contribute to the layers
of, meaning her character Kotzebue acquires in Percy Adlon's film Salmonberries. That is, in this film, the character resonates with lang's off screen persona in a manner which shifts the notion of the true body beneath the clothes and expression of identity onto a further playing field of meanings.

lang's appearance in the film Salmonberries illustrates how androgyny hybridizes her iconicity and character, confounding notions of truth, disguise and identity. lang's character in the film, Kotzebue, is an Eskimo foundling, a "boundary creature" (Haraway 1991, 23) on a quest to find her true identity. Kotzebue's identity has been shrouded in mystery from the time she was found as a baby in a package labeled Kotzebue with only two charm necklaces. Her physical appearance as a young adult prompts the people around her to mistake her for a boy.

Kotzebue's quest for her genealogical identity leads her to a librarian named Roswitha who is on an identity quest of her own, and who calls Kotzebue "boy" and "young man." After Roswitha's remarks in the library referring to Kotzebue's gender, Kotzebue steps behind a bookcase and reemerges undressed. Roswitha stares and turns away just as an aboriginal man, significantly named Butch, enters. Kotzebue quickly vanishes behind the shelves once again, as Butch says "maybe I do read too much at night, I just thought I saw a naked woman." Notions of true identity and origins parallel the quest for true gender in the film ironically and self-reflexively.
As opposed to the *Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) where the narrative is contingent upon the revelation of the male nude body (thought to be biologically female) towards the end of the film, Kotzebue strips at the beginning of the film. The notion of stripping to reveal a true self beneath a veil of mistaken identity or crossed-dress is fragmented on several levels in *Salmonberries*. In his essay "Unveiling the Word: Science and Narrative in Transsexual Striptease," (1992) Meyer establishes drag "as the basic folk performance form for the gay male subculture" (1992, 71). Significantly, the structure applies to Kotzebue’s stripping in the library:

The plots involve the entrance of the hero, who arrives purposefully disguised and therefore unrecognized. After being misidentified by the other characters and/or audience, the hero calls attention to his deception and makes claim to an alternate and supposedly true identity. The hero is then required to submit to a series of tests to verify his claim. (1992, 70-71)

Kotzebue’s nude body, in the film, is supposed to reveal gender deception and claim an alternate and “true” gender identity. She enters, like the hero in the folk theatre example, disguised and unrecognized to Roswitha and the others in the library. She strips, which calls attention to a deception and "makes claim to an alternate and supposedly true identity," that is, being female.

Following Meyer, Kotzebue’s performance falls into the category of drag because she is a woman in men’s clothes, a female-to-male impersonator. The claim to an alternate and supposedly true identity more
closely resonates, however, with conventional notions of cross-dressing, sexual difference and expressivity than drag. What is interesting is the position she takes up as a male impersonator where the audience expects her to reveal the woman underneath the clothes, hence the claim to her “true” gender identity. It is never made apparent in the film that Kotzebue meant to create a deception or disguise or was impersonating a male. Her position as a male impersonator is in question. Likewise, an audience would know that lang is female so that the revelation of the female body should not be a surprise. It is difficult to separate lang from her character during the moment of revelation, where lang’s appropriation of men’s clothing outside the film does not mistakenly construe her as male but as androgynous. lang signifies an androgyne playing an androgyne, where the revelation of the body, while significantly shocking to certain media, does not fix or stabilize gender or reveal the woman underneath. Stripping for the androgyne plays between the referents for male impersonator and the woman beneath the clothes in this scene and breaches the boundaries between lang and her character. That is, the revelation of the “womanly” body does not establish an alternate or more true identity for lang or the character’s androgyny.

While the fictional character’s stripping reveals she is biologically female, lang as star/icon is visually doing likewise. That is, the character and actor each resonate with their own specific meanings about the body and gender identity which play off one another. Jaye Davidson’s biological identity was carefully concealed from the media to ensure the stripping “effect” in The
Crying Game. The effect was to reveal that the deceptively female character was biologically male. In Salmonberries the media and most spectators were well aware that lang was a woman, which is why the effect of her unclothed body in the media is significant in its response of “shock” and “wonder.” The knowledge that lang is biologically female does nothing to alter the shock effect of the body, that is, there is still the expectation that some unknown will be revealed. “Her figure is a revelation. . . . Massive and voluptuous, her body has the gravitas of an ancient female fertility figure, all rounded thighs and belly and breasts. There is nothing boyish whatsoever about that body . . .” exclaimed Bennetts about this scene (1993, 143-4). Like the surprise that she has breasts and a “womanly” figure, revelation does nothing to fix or stabilize her gender outside androgyny. While there is “nothing boyish whatsoever about that body,” that body resonates with boyishness. The body resonating with androgyny complicates revelations about true identity. Stripping, in lang’s case, does not reveal the “woman” underneath because identity is torn asunder from the body as a stable signifier for gender. lang’s androgyny destabilizes myths of origin in relation to the body confounding notions of truth, disguise and identity.

Unlike parodic performance practices which subscribe to notions of an original or the authentic, camp challenges normative belief systems best when abstracted from traditional conventions. Just as drag makes use of cross-
dressing while cross-dressing alone does not signal camp, so camp makes use of parody, although parody alone does not signal camp:

Camp always uses parody but, more importantly, it embodies parody as a general mode of discourse. As a mode of discourse, parody typically operates within dominant ideology, but with an internal tension (Kleinhans, 188).

Camp's parody contains "active contradictions" which can "in certain social and historical contexts, challenge dominant culture" (Kleinhans, 188). This is significant because as certain Hollywood film examples will illustrate, the parodic practices used in these films do not contain active contradictions or challenge dominant culture; parody does not always signal camp even when camp elements are present. In Sam Abel's essay "The Rabbit in Drag: Camp and Gender Construction in the American Animated Cartoon," (1995), Abel notes that the cartoon world is one of the sites that facilitates a "double vision" (194). He notes that in drag "the transition to the feminine is never quite complete, nor is there ever an illusion that the character is anyone other than our masculine hero. Bugs never lets us forget that he is doing drag, and doing it brilliantly" (194). While Abel's reference to a stable masculine gender 'beneath' the feminine garb is problematic (although playful in the context of attributing masculinity to an animated rabbit), notions of incomplete transition and incongruity are important. A notion of the double vision dynamic of camp includes simultaneous identification and subversion and embodies "a self-constructed and constantly shifting role playing, an
awareness of the frame and conventions of the performance, an awareness of audience ... comic timing, and, most importantly, a defiance of an unseen authority” (197).

An example can be taken from Toronto filmmaker Keith Cole’s (producer, story idea, lead actor) short independent film Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman (1997). Subtitled “A Foreign Film Dubbed Into English ... sort of,” the film appropriates the form of the foreign film with dubbed voice over. Utilizing the very worst possibilities for the genre such as out of synch voice-overs and actors’ voices laden with heavy accents, the film parodies and camps the dubbed film convention. Cole says that “sometimes they [dubbed films] sound completely unreal and that’s what I like about them.”20 The actors in his film are in fact all English, and they are speaking English in the film. The film was shot in Toronto and Vancouver, hardly “foreign” environments to Canadians, although the setting for the film is ostensibly Berlin (hence the over the top and heavy German and “tour of Europe”21 accents of the voice-overs). As Cole puts it “After all, whose voice isn’t dubbed? I mean, really.”22 The abstraction from conventional forms infiltrates the film as a whole, “there’s more going on in this film than what they’re saying,” says Cole.23

The narrative is non-linear and non-causal and embodies a double vision, utilizing the “cartoon world” as a backdrop. The main character, Karl (played by Cole), is a wildly successful underground comic book author who is in love with an old flame, Gretchen (Helen Donnelly). The film jumps
between episodes in Karl’s analysis sessions. We see his naked analyst play with a phallic carrot and dress up as Gretchen in her commercial model incarnation as a milk-maid while Karl lies on the couch in a floral print dress. The film cuts to his childhood in a classroom where his teacher, dressed up in a costume representing the “Fool,” instructs the class “Vimen, zay are veak und girlish,” echoing Karl’s own sentiments earlier on. The parodic re-vision of women as “girlish” takes the term beyond the notion of female youth. Karl is a “Nancy boy” or an effeminate male and “girlish,” with anything but normative sexual fantasies and desires. Fetishistic desire is the “norm” in the film’s world.

Gretchen is portrayed in a Berlin 1920s cabaret style as a harsh “manly woman,” in a fitted suit with short jet black hair and ruby red lips. Flashbacks to Karl and Gretchen’s love affair show her dressed up as the feminine Swedish milk maid, with a blond braided wig and crinoline dress. A central scene involves her invitation to Karl to a party at her home where he believes she will beg for a reconciliation. Rather, she tosses him an apron and tells him to tend bar. The promise of a sexual favour seals the deal, that is, she will put on “the glove” later on if he will tend bar. What we see in another flashback is that “the glove” entails playing shadow puppets on the wall, which is a source of intense sexual pleasure for Karl. The film parodies the notion of “sexual deviation” where fetishistic desire is itself parodied – shifting the model off the idea of an already distanced notion of sexual “perversion” (that is, sexual fetishism is already removed from normative
sexuality) onto a further one which *plays with those meanings*. The original meanings are constituted as effects in a form which enables a further doubling of meanings.

The film enables parodic "fantasy" on several levels. Scorned by Gretchen at her party, Karl takes a walk where he is mugged by two assailants. Karl is then accosted by a very masculine officer of the law, who is played by a female, Joy Lachica. During this scene, Karl is transformed into a "bizarre transvestite *uber mensch*,"\(^{24}\) otherwise known as superhero, Nancy Boy. His costume entails very small blue underwear and a tight black T-shirt with NB emblazoned across the front. He wears big, retro (1960s) sunglasses and a scarf tied around his neck. While not an animated film, the parodic inscription of an effeminate super hero sends up ideas about the cartoon world, referring to the prescriptive mandate for hyperbolic masculinity within the traditional comic book superhero genre. References to cartoon and comic book worlds not only enable a double vision in this case, but those worlds themselves are doubled. Out of the mist and night sky, Gretchen appears, transformed into superhero Manly Woman, with a whip, leather bodice, and Viking hat playing upon the cues for sadomasochistic sexuality\(^{25}\), flanked by two drag kings\(^{26}\).

The film has a false ending, parodying the neat closure of "it was all just a dream" genres. The film presents a final scene where Karl is dressed very conservatively, in an all white and beige room (in contrast to the rainbow of colours and kitchy accessories of Karl's apartment), drawing. He
answers the phone and speaks without a foreign accent to someone he will be meeting for dinner. We believe for an instant that this straight world is the "real" world and the rest has been some wild dalliance of his imagination, a bizarre world he is drawing, now safely contained. Suddenly, we are thrust back into the nighttime scene where Karl is being accosted by the officer. In the film's final moment Karl looks directly into the camera to the audience and says "Zat vas Vierd!" Indeed, the "weird" has become the "straight world" in the hyperbolic parodic context of Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman.

**Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman** pulls various genres' referents into its narrative enabling the film itself to become hyperbolic and subject to a double vision because of the active contradictions taking place there. The frame and conventions shift under camp and drag conditions in a circuit effect of meaning. What happens to drag and camp when its signs are appropriated by the dominant culture and are framed by the Hollywood form such as in the films Tootsie and To Wong Foo?

The contemporary Hollywood narrative film form is based upon the classical (dominant, Hollywood, approximately 1930-1960) cinema which has traditionally maintained a coherent sense of time, space and action, where characters are situated in stories which are dependent on them as agents of cause and effect. Closure is an important aspect of the form. Also important is the "concept of a classical model with fixed conventions of film practice that are repeated from product to product and that the audience comes to rely on and to expect" (Kaplan, 11). E. Ann Kaplan refers to the central elements of
classical cinema as genres, stars, producers and directors (11). Genres, stars and producers are directly related to the selling of films. "The public come to demand certain stars and desire certain genres," which vary in different periods, and producers try to "satisfy their public and develop marketing strategies to this end" (11). Directors are not tied directly to the commercialism of the whole but they are implicated by the system "and their ideology reflects this (the ideology works through them)" (12). While the cinematic form generates its own meanings and codes, it shares with traditional naturalistic theatre a common aspect of concealing its processes or technical apparatus (which "refers to the cinema in its many dimensions — economic, technical, psychological, and ideological") which generate particular ideological meanings in terms of illusionism (Kaplan, 12). When Abel says that the cartoon world facilitates camp's double vision there is a sense that traditional forms, such as the Hollywood narrative form, have a vision which suppresses awareness of the conventions of the frame. Traditional forms are less likely to facilitate rupture, fluidity and transformation characteristic of drag, camp and gender play. The content needs to play upon and exceed the form for a camp effect to occur. Otherwise, as we will see in To Wong Foo and Tootsie, the form recuperates normative notions of gender and sexuality.
Tootsie

The Hollywood film *Tootsie* (1982) presents key examples of cross-dressing, male-female binaries, and mandatory heterosexuality, situating the spectator firmly within a normative paradigm by appealing to a sympathy for the crossed-dressed character's various dilemmas. How can our crossed-dressed hero get the girl, in a dress, and still be heterosexual? The boy-gets-girl genre is complicated by cross-dressing in this film, but it in no way destabilizes the expectations or assumed desires for the film's spectators for normative resolution and closure.

*Tootsie* shows how cross-dressing does not a camp or drag performance make. Camp elements such as the "theatrical" and "character" used self-referentially and metaphorically in the film, in no way suggest a camp performance even though the theatrical is manifest through cross-dressing for the purposes of character. Located in gender binaries and parodic performance practices which do not subvert normative notions of gender and sexuality but which reinscribe them, *Tootsie* is based on certain limited but resonant notions of "passing."  

In *Tootsie*, passing is actually more in keeping with a notion of disguise which refers to a true identity behind the one that is being revealed; here passing recuperates notions of gender identity in relation to sexual difference and traditional binaries where the attempt is to fool someone into believing the "wrong" gender of the impersonator. Passing, in this sense, is problematized in the film because it is the very obstacle to Michael's
achieving his goal of Julie's romantic affections. Michael must pass as Dorothy to work in a soap opera, but must fail to pass if he wants to achieve a romantic liaison with his love interest Julie. While drag embraces the destabilization of passing (incongruity as opposed to the seamless cross-dressed illusion of passing as a woman or man), Tootsie is not about drag because the referents are still male-female binaries located in heterosexual sexuality.

For example, Tootsie consistently has its cross-dressed character Dorothy Michaels/Michael Dorsey affirm throughout the film that the man beneath the dress is heterosexual by having him flirt with his love-interest Julie. This simultaneously establishes a lesbian theme between Julie and Dorothy and a male gay theme between Dorothy and Julie's father who likewise is unaware that Dorothy is in fact male and who pursues Dorothy amorously. This is a cat and mouse chase, which depends on the parodic "if they only know the truth . . ." scenario. While the film plays upon these sexualities, it is corrective, establishing the goal to unite Julie and Michael in heterosexuality and appropriate dress by presenting these sexualities as mistakes which would disappear if the truth were known. The audience is situated in a position of knowledge, privileged to the deception and complications which arise. The conflict which demands resolution is not only will the hero get the girl, but will the hero get the girl in an appropriately heterosexual and normatively clothed/gendered way. This parallels the progression towards resolution and closure. The referents for the authentic,
the original or the real are not recontextualized. The parody in this case is not of the notion of an original (which would be in keeping with drag) but is based on an idea of an "original" gender that is "true." *Tootsie's* implications are that authentic gender can be found and reconciled normatively.

Camp and drag notions of transformation, theatricality and role playing are parodied (i.e. parody based on a traditional notion of 'imitation') normatively in the context of *Tootsie*, which, cleverly in this film, appears to shift off conventional roles for feminine and masculine behaviour. Michael Dorsey, played by Dustin Hoffman, is an out of work actor who assumes the guise of a woman, Dorothy Michaels, to get a job on a well-known television soap opera. The opening sequence of the film shows Michael Dorsey applying facial hair and a mustache to his face. This is intercut with his teaching acting classes; throughout the following quick sequences we watch him go to various auditions in various male guises, trying to get the part. In one of these auditions, with extra facial hair, he reads the script with a male stage manager who reads the part of a woman. Sexual difference is brought to the fore immediately. The context is about acting, and Dorsey's various male guises suggest that he believes his various outward appearances will express a closeness to the character he hopes to play. There is a sense from these various made-up transformations, however, that one can play a "man" differently, that there are different "styles" one can adopt for the same sex, but this difference is still relegated to a paradigm with specific prescriptions within a range for male behaviour that is also established very early on in the
film. This is important, because as I will show in chapter three there are fascinating possibilities for same-sex drag. In terms of establishing the character’s future motivation for his transformation — no one will hire him, “We’re looking for someone else,” he is told repeatedly. Theatrical transformation, associated with drag and camp, is made prominent immediately. So are the attitudes believed to reside in male behaviour, ones which are continually referred to throughout the film which fix Michael to his appropriate gender whilst cross-dressed. For example, Michael is thrown a surprise party by his writer friend, played by Bill Murray, and it is in this social context where his interaction with the opposite sex is established as “typical” male behaviour. For example, he uses the popular line “I’ll call you,” to a woman he obviously has no intention of calling.

* Michael’s best friend Sandi (Terri Garr) is an aspiring actress who has an upcoming audition for a role on a television soap opera, which, when Michael asks her why she thinks she won’t get the part, says it is because they are looking for “a woman.” Again, the novel sense is that you can be a woman and not play the part of the woman accurately. Her comment, aside from reflecting her low self-esteem in the film, begins to indicate how the film uses drag and camp ideas of gender plurality which it will then go about correcting. While she distances herself from the notion of the ideal independent woman she believes the part calls for (recuperating the cliché of the dependent woman), it is Michael who decides to go for the part (recuperating the cliché of the independent man), dressed as a woman, and
who berates the director for wanting a caricature of woman "which says that power makes a woman masculine." In an apparent irony, the director tells Michael, who comes to the audition as Dorothy that she is too feminine to read for the part. The unique twist is that a man can play the part of a woman and not be read as too masculine by virtue of the fact that he is “really” a man. Michael defiantly stands up for feminine yet powerful women, and gets the part. As the producer of the show says to Dorothy, “You are the first woman character who is her own person, who can assert her own personality without robbing someone of theirs. You’re a breakthrough lady for us.” He is apparently playing the social role for women against type; femininity is brought outside the domain of passivity. However, because his character is consistently deferring to the meanings of the “real” man underneath the dress, the “breakthrough” lady can only be a man. The codes for gender appear to be expanded beyond their traditional meanings. The film tries to conceal its ideology around gender by having it appear as though there is a shift in “expressing” gender normatively.

The role he plays on the show calls for a thoroughly modern, independent woman who stands up for herself and other women: “Stop thinking of me as a woman and start thinking of me as a person,” the character in the soap says. The line “I’m proud to be a woman, Dr. Bruester” from the television script is repeated frequently and is meant to be discrepant with Michael’s appearance as Dorothy. Michael takes this “proud role” into his life outside the show, where he continues to dress as a woman to get close
to his love interest, Julie, who is on the show and therefore cannot know he is not a woman. He also thinks that Dorothy deserves her own television special. He says to his agent (played by director Pollack), the only one outside of his best friend (and the spectator) who is aware of the deception, “that part is coming out of me . . . there’s a woman in me.” To which the agent responds “You’re Michael — you’re acting Dorothy.” And while the film has the agent reiterate throughout the film to Michael (and the spectator) that he is not a woman, and that he has no right standing up for women’s rights (voicing a position which pretends not to speak for women, which as a category can be spoken for by some essentialized woman), Michael’s main action is to liberate his/her love interest from the clutches of a manipulative caricature of a sexist man who is the director of the soap opera. Women’s rights aside, Michael must come to the rescue.

The film makes it clear that while Michael can play the part of the woman, he is really a man, connected to inherently masculine behaviour and male heterosexual desires. For instance, as Dorothy in the soap opera, she is supposed to kiss Dr. Bruester, who is played by an actor whom the other actresses label “the tongue.” The conflict set up is how will Dorothy, who is really a man, subvert this act (how will Michael rescue Dorothy)? Dorothy subverts the kiss by hitting the actor over the head during the moment when she is supposed to kiss him, in the name of character motivation. The director chastises her for her actions and calls her “Toots.” As Michael, he tells his friend how he hates that the director calls women names that are not
their own such as baby, sweetheart, tootsie and says, “If I didn’t have the dress on I’d have kicked his arrogant ass.” Instead, as Dorothy, he apologized. The dress, symbolizing women’s passivity, is a literal barrier to physicalizing rage, associated with male behaviour. In a parodic twist which in no way destabilizes Michael’s “manhood,” the actor playing Dr. Bruester congratulates Dorothy on her instincts during the scene and plants a kiss on her then and there. The film plays with the cues for sexuality whilst maintaining an “attitude” about appropriate sexual behaviour.

The part of playing the woman is made unnatural and undesirable when the objective is to get the girl, that is, when the heterosexual paradigm for gender begins to shift. For example, Michael visits Sandi after winning the part on the show. While she is in the shower Michael notices a dress in the closet he wants to try on, for the purposes of his disguise as Dorothy we might assume. When he is disrobed down to his underwear, Sandi appears in the bedroom and is confused by Michael’s lack of clothing. His response is to have sex with her. His desire to try on the dress is countered with a heterosexual act for appropriate male desire. This scene also sets up the conditions for Michael’s future behaviour in relation to women. He will now set about treating Sandi, the way the sexist director treats Julie, Michael’s love interest. He says to Sandi, like he said to the woman at the party, that he’ll “call her.” Throughout the film he misses the dates they plan and contrives lies and excuses for his behaviour. The attitudes for male behaviour in the film, set up earlier, constitute the background against which Dorothy’s closeness to
Julie (love interest) and Michael’s attitude towards Sandi (best friend), who desires him, is played out. Julie complains to Dorothy a.k.a. Michael about the behaviour of her boyfriend, the director. Dorothy is sympathetic but because Michael treats Sandi the same way the sexist director treats Julie, Michael is situated as being the true gender or referent.

Because the Hollywood form requires closure and resolution the charade must come to an end. Critical events which force this movement have to do with mandatory heterosexuality. Julie comes to believe that Dorothy is a lesbian, and says to Dorothy that while she has feelings for her she does not share the same “impulses.” (This also invokes the stereotypical notion that lesbians are “masculine women.”) Julie’s concern is for her father who is unaware of Dorothy’s sexual preference and who consequently proposes to Dorothy. The film evokes sympathy for Michael, Julie and Julie’s father, positioning them as unable to attain their heart’s desire because of the obstacle of inappropriately directed sexual desire. Michael finally reveals he is a man while taping a live version of the soap opera, incorporating the deception into the role of the character he plays. Julie’s reaction is to punch him in the stomach. Michael eventually meets with Julie’s father in a bar where no women are present, where Michael swears he will never tell anyone what happened between them, that is, that this wronged man had affections for a man in a dress. Finally, Michael catches up with a still angry Julie on the street and says, “I was a better man with you as a woman then I ever was with a woman as a man. I just gotta learn to do it without the dress.
At this point in our relationship there might be an advantage to my wearing pants.” They walk off together in a reconciliatory “fashion” and the film ends. Proper gender behaviour and heterosexuality is restored. The films mandate comes to final fruition, the straight man gets the straight woman — and wears the pants.

To Wong Foo: Thanks for Nothing?

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar (1995) appropriates the codes and signs that are usually associated with camp and drag, and subverts camp’s and drag’s potential to move beyond the binary of man and woman or cross-dressing in significant ways. Casting well known Hollywood stars as drag queens resonates with the idea of “real” men beneath the feminine apparel. Normative sexuality is reinscribed by calling the drag queens “angels” and enabling the “real girl” in the film to get the “straight boy.” Pulling the cues for camp into the mainstream by locating camp elements in a conventional form with specific expectations for and from its audience, the Hollywood film To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar provides an example that parody alone does not signal camp and that appropriation does not challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality.

This film takes the corrective aspects of Tootsie one step further by appropriating conventional signs that signal camp. Camp elements in this film include drag contests, flamboyant attitudes and spectacle. For example,
stranded in a small town when their car breaks down, reduced to having to pass the time in a dumpy worn-down hotel room, the three drag queens manifest what they call “Operation Decorator Storm” and magically transform the room into a glamorous boudoir. This film appropriates the camp nostalgia for old movie stars where cameos include Julie Newmar and Quentin Crisp. Deciding what type of car the drag queens should buy for a long road trip across the country the question is put: “style or substance?” They choose the stylish car playing upon the popular notion of camp as stylish and substance-free. During a “day with the girls” of the town, they shop for retro clothing and squeal in delight at finding a treasure of glamorous clothes from the 1960s in a long forgotten section of the only frumpy clothing store in town. Beauty makeovers facilitate turning the town’s women into varied imitations of drag queens. The “Strawberry Social” becomes a camp project for the drag queens who suddenly want a theme — “red!”

Casting two well known, very masculine stars in the roles of the drag queens plays a significant role in the film’s stunted ability to move beyond the binary of man and woman or cross-dressing. This notion seems to suggest that one might need to be familiar with the stars and their work in order for these significations to come into play. For the purposes of this section that is true. Hollywood maintains a contemporary star system or celebrity culture which is a significant part of its ideology and as such it often depends upon
the spectators’ familiarity with the star. The casting of these particular stars is significant. One of these stars, Wesley Snipes, who plays drag queen Noxeema Jackson, is mostly associated with action films. His usual association with the action genre and To Wong Foo’s casting of him as a drag queen, serves as a significant backdrop against which his crossing gender and crossing star-type are played out (which would probably hold the appeal of curiosity for many film goers). Patrick Swayze plays drag queen Vida Boheme and resonates with his last big film hit Ghost (Jerry Zucker, 1990) where he plays a spirit. This is significant as it resonates with the way To Wong Foo implicitly situates him as an “angel” in the film’s narrative with respect to sexuality by attempting to move him “beyond” the body (whilst firmly anchoring him to the body).

Vida, like Noxeema, never expresses interest located in sexual desire, and is framed as the care-taker, as a maternal figure. Vida forms a special bond with Carol Ann (a woman, played by Stockard Channing, from the small town they are forced to pass the time in while their car is being repaired), who is abused by her husband, and assists her in breaking the bonds of that destructive relationship. Vida is Carol Ann’s “saviour.” It is Carol Ann who says to Vida, as the drag queens are about to leave town to go to their version of heaven, California, “I don’t think of you as a man or a woman. I think of you as an angel.” This comment works as part of an illusionistic narrative strategy which manifests in various ways throughout the film. The star’s bodies are anchored referents for masculinity and
heterosexuality. Masculinity and heterosexuality are paradoxically secured by
having the film make the characters' bodies "invisible." The characters are
angels, made safe, in terms of their appearance in the film, retaining them as
men beneath that appearance. The film tries to minimize the contestation
between the stars' roles and their bodies.

The stars are kept safe from their character's sexual preferences. Camp's
fascination with a range of sexual identities, the layering of referents for
desire, is suppressed. The popular stars' characters are likewise made safe
even though unconventional gender portrayal as drag queens should signify
anything but normative sexuality given that culture conventionally collapses
heterosexuality into normative gender performance and homosexuality onto
unconventional gender practices, as was explored in chapter one. I will
explore further on how the stars' gender performance in their crossed dress is
in no way conflicting with normative sexuality. Gender play is squelched.

No matter how "beyond this world" sexuality might signify in relation
to the angelic drag queen, Swayze's star status and hyperbolic musculature
firmly ground him in terms of gender expectation. The expressive referent is
not only the "male" beneath the feminine clothing but the star beneath
clothing. Significantly, it is the least well known actor in the film, John
Leguizamo, who plays Chi Chi Rodriguez, who appears the most "feminine"
and is allowed to have sexual desire for a man.30 That is, sexuality is only
dealt with on a level which might produce the least amount of anxiety for a
normatively positioned audience with expectations for the male stars on the
screen. Contained in a Hollywood form synonymous with the "boy gets the
girl" tradition, this film makes sure that the boy who gets the girl, gets a girl
with the "right" biology. Chi Chi falls in love with Billy Ray (significantly the
boy gets the girl subplot involves unknown actors, their actions speak for
themselves, their bodies correspond to their desires, nothing to protect or
subvert) who falls for Chi Chi, calling her "the perfect girl," not knowing
"she" is a "he." This lack of knowledge constitutes the main conflict of the
subplot which is heightened by having an appropriate love interest, sweet
and innocent Bobby Ray desire Billy Ray. (The name "Bobby" is usually
associated with a male, where here it is the female's name which is an
interesting self-referential same-sex referent in "contrast" to the normative
aspect of these two character's gender. The very close similarity in
enunciation, however, symbolizes what is the "same" in the normative
tradition. They are the same in performing their gender and sexuality
"appropriately.")

The film's goal is to get Billy Ray and Bobby Ray together. Chi Chi
becomes the "undesirable" love object. She must sacrifice her love and desire
to the dominant order's paradigm. (Interestingly, this sacrifice resembles the
fallen woman of traditional melodrama, where certain desires are constituted
as inappropriate for female gender behaviour. The woman must sacrifice her
love for a more appropriate love interest and be sacrificed for her desires.)
Vida becomes the voice of morality (angel) telling Chi Chi her relationship
with Billy Ray is impossible: "You're deluding yourself," she says, because
they both have "the same business in-between your legs." In the context of homosexual desire, Chi Chi's love is made deceptive and immoral. Vida says "You're deceiving that child [Billy Ray]... and you know Miss Bobby Ray is in love with him." During a separate confrontation over the same issue Vida says to Chi Chi, "I won't let you play games with other people, there are human rules which operate, sweetheart..." It is these very "human" rules that drag and camp challenge, disrupt, unsettle by playing upon the rules. Human rules, or the dominant paradigm, are recuperated here by having a supposed drag queen be the voice for that paradigm.

Vida is linked to angelic presence with her taking Julie Newmar's picture, with the inscription "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar," off the wall of a restaurant where the three plan their trip. Vida calls the picture a "sovereign token" and the picture is placed in the car they drive like a religious artifact such as those hung on rearview mirrors to protect and guide. Because the title of the film is named after this artifact, and this artifact serves as an extension of Vida's role, we can see how the film is symbolically tied directly to Vida's voice and actions. The film uses her as its guide and voice to maintain and protect the dominant order. These types of normative and constraining conditions, which are operating amidst camp's cues in this film, have traditionally been the impetus for the camp language or "strategies for survival" explored in chapter one, a strategy to counter the oppressive conditions, found in this film, which disable desire.
Having spent the first part of this chapter delineating the importance of failed seamlessness for camp and drag it might seem contradictory to say that the apparent discrepancy between the stars and their roles falls into the same ballpark as expressivity or conventional cross-dressing. If these stars are playing, incongruously, roles against “type,” there might be a case for drag and camp. Rather, this is an example of how the film makes use of camp’s elements without being camp itself. The performances of the stars are not, in fact, failed “seamless” impersonations. Their own iconicity in relation to the “female” roles they are playing does not constitute the type of incongruity which resonates with drag and camp because we are nonetheless brought to a field of meanings that restricts the movement outside myths of origin and imitation. The film upholds the myth of “real men” by putting these stars in dresses. There is the expectation that these stars, fixed in terms of their gender in the popular imagination, will remain real men within the context of their performance, comforting any anxiety about gender displacement. As such, the performances do maintain the standards of gender familiar to most spectators. That is, the seamless illusion of real men is upheld within the performative narrative of gender for this film. Again, importantly, the idea of seamlessness is itself a contradictory notion which at the same time depends on stable referents which are impossible under the conditions for the signification of femininity and masculinity in time. In the case of this film, the form depends on the assumption that the man/star/identity beneath the dress is coherent enough to challenge any disruptions located in gender. This
film does not utilize notions of imperfection to challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality, which drag and camp do.

Camp Elements Subverted

Because familiar camp cues have been appropriated by a traditional form, the film needs to explain what the audience might recognize but not understand. Vida, Noxeema and Chi Chi ride in a cadillac convertible across the country to compete in the “Drag Queen Of America” contest. Vida and Noxeema “tied” in a preliminary contest which made them eligible to compete in the bigger contest. Chi Chi did not win, and a selfless Vida, out of the goodness of her heart, persuades Noxeema that they should take Chi Chi along with them. Chi Chi takes the role of the uninitiated, she is a “drag princess” to their “drag queen” status. The film uses this as an opportunity to educate its audience. When Chi Chi refers to herself as a drag queen, Noxeema explains;

You’re simply a boy in a dress... When a straight man puts on a dress and gets his sexual kicks, he is a transvestite. When a man is a woman trapped in a man’s body and has the little operation, he is a transsexual. When a gay man has way too much fashion sense for one gender, he’s a drag queen and when a tired little Latin boy puts on a dress, he is simply a boy in a dress.
Interestingly enough, Noxeema’s explanation does encompass the notion that drag is not about “putting on a dress” and that it moves beyond “one gender.” The film, however cannot let this explanation move beyond the binary of genders and ultimately positions the two masculine stars, whose characters do have drag and camp aspects of “too much fashion sense,” as “men in dresses.”

While the film is aware enough of its own conventions to provide definitions about drag for its audience, the film does not investigate its position in relation to the content. Moreover, the content in no way challenges the form or exceeds it. There is no exceeding the parameters of the Hollywood convention when the hyperbolic is subdued by narrative strategies which keep gender and sexuality safe.

Significantly, we never see Noxeema or Chi Chi out of feminine apparel or makeup. On a visual level, there are no actual scenes (apart from Vida briefly) where we see the characters appear as conventional men. The film minimizes visual contrast by not creating frequent jarring or altering effects, which actually conceals the fact that it is the contrast between these stars and their characters that the film depends on. The only character we see outside the feminine frame of reference is Vida and this happens only twice. The first time is at the very beginning of the film, when Vida is putting on makeup, already partially applied, without a wig or top. The opening sequence also cuts to Noxeema putting on makeup, but she is almost finished
her application process, in full wig, makeup and dress. The second time we see Vida in any way that directly points to the man-beneath-the-clothes is the moment when her wig comes off by accident, during a confrontation with Chi Chi about Billy Ray (which is also significant because Vida’s argument about Chi Chi’s relationship with Billy Ray has to do with what’s between Chi Chi’s legs or underneath her dress). What is important here is the notion that the film implicitly depends on the real man beneath clothing. By keeping the stars in dresses the film works to conceal the very processes which hold up dominant notions of gender and sexuality.

In terms of how the film deals (or does not deal) with race it is also significant that the two characters who never take off their makeup or feminine clothing are not white. The film constantly refers to Chi Chi’s status as “a little Latin boy” and never refers to Snipes’ character Noxeema as black, which is significant. The first encounter between Noxeema and Vida and Chi Chi happens after Chi Chi has lost the drag contest and is weeping in a stairwell: It is Noxeema who says this “little Latin boy in drag is crying.” Bell Hooks argues that in the documentary Paris is Burning (1990), which focuses on the public and private spheres of poor black and Hispanic gays in New York City’s Harlem, the aspiration in drag is toward “white femininity” in the context of the drag ball contests, an issue that is never investigated by the director, Livingston, who hides her own presence within the structure of the documentary, hence the “motives” for her sub-cultural investigation. To Wong Foo, within the Hollywood tradition, likewise conceals its processes,
where the aspiration for these characters seems not so much towards white femininity but towards recuperating normative “human” cues for gender and sexuality which apparently transcend the body and race. Snipes as Noxeema has a lot at stake appearing in a dress, in addition to his masculine star status, for as Hooks notes,

For black males to take appearing in drag seriously, be they gay or straight, is to oppose a heterosexist representation of black manhood. Gender bending and blending on the part of black males has always been a critique of phallocentric masculinity in traditional black experience. (1992, 147)

Snipes’s star status can be regarded as upholding phallocentric masculinity, within the confines of a Hollywood system which perpetuates those codes. In this context, his recognizability and hyperbolic masculinity work to achieve the maintenance of heterosexist representations of black manhood, that in this film, are not challenged by appearing in “drag.” Because we never see him out of his crossed attire, we never have to deal with the added meanings that exist in relation to race which might be effected were the act of cross-dressing made more blatant in his case and not simply a model of expressivity. To watch him cross over would mean watching a black man contest heterosexist representations of black manhood. Instead, we can feel safe in “knowing” the star is Snipes, already packaged as a drag queen, but never have to acknowledge his complicity in challenging dominant systems in any way that might disturb that star status.
Conclusion

This chapter explored the notions of gender play and drag, moving off a model of cross-dressing located in male-female binaries and heterosexual sexuality. Exploring two Hollywood films which seem to move off these models because they appropriate the signs associated with drag and camp, but which in fact recuperate normative notions of gender and sexuality has provided the groundwork for the explosive performances in the next chapter, which include same-sex drag. It also serves as an important backdrop against which the theoretical discourses of the next chapter are challenged. Certain Theoretical discourses limited to an understanding of drag and camp located in films or practices such as in this chapter, have limited the ability for some theorists to move beyond definitions of drag and camp outside of conventional cross-dressing and parody. By showing how these two films subvert gender play, it is possible to understand why the conflation of terms stunts camp’s perceived potential to challenge dominant meanings accorded to gender. Keith Cole’s film Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman illustrated the potential for a doubling of vision in drag and camp, an expansion of the form and hyperbolization of the cues for gender and sexuality. The next chapter focuses on “Female Camp,” examining the limiting discourses for its potential and some of its stunning possibilities in theory and practice.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 There are, obviously, different kinds of camp "effects." I am using a definition of the "camp effect" which focuses on my exploration of gender destabilization in this thesis.

2 Chapter four's analysis of *Batman Returns* will explore issues of identity and the coherent subject, where Catwoman's drag includes stitches that are far from seamless but come undone, reflecting a more fluid representation of self and subjectivity.

3 Jill Dolan's essay "In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism . . . and Theory" (1996) reflects upon the differences amongst various feminisms in relation to theory. A sociological study would regard Western theatre, for example, as holding up a mirror to either positive or negative reflections of society without exploring "the methodology and assumptions of patriarchal production on which it is based" (99). Sociological perspectives regard theatre as mimesis, where information on the actual lives of women can be known through theatre history and dramatic literature. Poststructuralism is unwilling to idolize the text and insists upon the "shifting, historical nature of the meanings representation produces" (95).

4 In the case of *Paris is Burning* there is a discrepancy between the goal and the significations. This is not the focus of the section, however. I use the examples from the film here only to illustrate the contestants' attachment to the notion of "realness" in relation to seamless perfection. See the end of this chapter and Bell Hooks (1992) for further discussion.

5 Interview with Lavinia in Chermayeff, 1995, 41.

6 Interview with Anderson in Chermayeff, 1995, 70.

7 Ibid, 70-71.
The personal pronoun reflects the performer's identification with the female gender. It also reflects the pronoun's common usage as exchanged between gender performers.

Interview with Lypsinka in Chermayeff (1995), 74.

Ibid.


Interview with Anderson in Chermayeff, 62.

The show played on the following dates: July 4, July 5, July 8, July 9, July 11, July 12, 1998 at the George Ignatieff Theatre, 15 Devonshire Place, Toronto, Ontario.


Butler notes that feminist theory understands "such parodic entities" as degrading to women (1990a, 137).

In Feminism and Theatre (1988), Sue-Ellen Case relates the common practice of casting blond women as ingenues and brunettes in the secondary vamp roles which is seen as betraying cultural attitudes about innocence, purity and desireability in relation to certain racial features: "The casting of beautiful women in ingenue roles, or the rise of the beautiful stage star, participates in patriarchal prejudices that control the sign system of the representation of women on stage" (117).

lang’s current status as the makeup spokeswoman for MAC cosmetics along with transgendered RuPaul plays heavily upon the contradictions inherent in their assuming these positions. lang and RuPaul do not conform to the normative prescriptions for makeup spokespersons or models and are always positioned in reference to this incongruity. I attended MAC's Fashion Cares: Photo Ball 1997 which is a fashion show event to raise money and awareness for HIV and AIDS which lang and RuPaul attended as spokespersons. At the media conference for the show these juxtapositions were in evidence. I asked lang what she liked most about her character on the Ellen Degeneres "coming
out” show, which was a groundbreaking show because the lead female character, Ellen, reveals that she is “gay.” lang answered, “My hair. A lot of girls in the mid-west probably thought I never looked so good.” Hair has been a contentious issue with lang throughout her career. She once said “When I first got to Nashville . . . I was given a pink handbook on how to be a country-and-western star. Section IA, the first rule of country-and-western stardom, is, ‘The higher the hair, the closer to God.’ I tried, but it just wasn’t me” (Robertson 1992, 78). A reporter asked RuPaul who made his dress. His reply was fashion designer, Todd Oldham. The reporter then asked “and kd?” lang responded, “I’m not wearing a dress.” There was much laughter from the media, lang and RuPaul because she was obviously wearing a “man’s” suit and had to check the label to find out who the designer was. The incongruities inherent in their gender reversals engage the play between notions of ‘inner’ and ‘outward’ appearance.

18 The emphasis reflects the notions of “natural species” mentioned in chapter one (Butler, Merleau-Ponty) in contrast to alternate species significations such as the hybridized characters in chapter four.

19 Dolly Parton is another excellent example for femme camp performance but not within the scope of this thesis.

20 From a personal interview with Keith Cole on March 25, 1998.

21 Ibid. Cole used this phrase to encourage the actors to use whatever accent they felt they did best which, he tells me, included “Russian and Mexican accents.”


23 Personal interview.

24 From a synopsis of the film in press release materials for the film.

25 Chapter four investigates the meanings for S/M as a structuring device in relation to drag and camp in Batman Returns (Burton, 1992).
Chapter three explores the camp and drag practices of The Greater Toronto Drag King Society, members of whom appear in *Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman*.

Connected to important historical and theoretical definitions and explorations, passing has conventionally been regarded as the move “from a category of subordination and oppression to one of freedom and privilege” (Ginsberg, 1996, 1) usually in relation to race (black African American slaves who were able to save their lives by passing as white, which included transgressing legal and cultural boundaries) class and gender (women who passed as men, acquiring economic and social privilege). Contemporary writing on passing is intrinsically tied to notions of identity. In an introduction to a critical anthology called *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (1996) Elaine K. Ginsberg says that passing is about identities: “their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing. Finally, passing is about specularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen” (Ginsberg, 2). Passing, in relation to the “privileged” and visible Butch vs. the “unseen” Femme, will be explored and problematized in relation to Feminist and Lesbian performance theory and practice in chapter three.

I am referring to Hollywood’s “ideology” in the tradition of film critics such as E. Ann Kaplan, who, borrowing from Althusser, describes ideology as “a series of representations and images reflecting the conceptions of ‘reality’ that any society assumes. Ideology thus no longer refers to beliefs people consciously hold but to the myths that a society lives by, as if these myths referred to some natural, unproblematic ‘reality’” (1983, 12-13).

In *Stars* Richard Dyer (1998) investigates the various critical and theoretical approaches which have been made regarding the phenomenon of stardom.
The actor is known in some circles for his one-man shows, *Mambo Mouth* and *Spic-O-Rama*, which include drag. This resonates with the idea that his image does not require 'protecting'; correctives do not have to be taken up to secure his image, which already resonates with his character. As an actor who already plays with notions of gender and sexuality the film casts him in a role which deals with sexual preference.

There has been little critical and theoretical analysis about race in drag and camp which deserves a much more comprehensive analysis than the scope of my thesis allows. Bell Hooks' essay on the film *Paris is Burning* (Livingstone, 1991) entitled "Is Paris Burning?" (1992) stands as an important document in the field and testament to the necessity for further investigation.
CHAPTER III
Female Camp

This chapter will examine the notions surrounding the citations against camp practice in feminist discourse and lesbian critical theory. I will explore the misconceptions about camp practice that are based on the preconceptions about the gay male tradition of camp, based on a heterosexual paradigm and located in cross-dressing. The obstacles to envisioning a female camp are compounded by the call for a feminist subject position\(^1\) which binds the notion of femininity to a wholistic and non-negotiable female body paradoxically contested by the term feminist, and femme which is articulated only in terms of a relation to the privileged and visible butch.\(^2\) Moving the femme out of the "butch-femme economy" (Case "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 1989) enables a female camp practice that moves into genders and sexualities. That is, the notion of a stable identity fixed in certain gender or sexuality will be challenged and redefined, opening up the possibility for proliferations and permutations.

Issues of identity and representation encompass much critical inquiry in the 1990s. In 1993, Lynda Hart ("Identity and Seduction: Lesbians in the Mainstream" 1993), like Butler, departs from the politics of identity and visibility, seeking to correct the "problem of identity with the process of identification" (Case 1996, 14). "Identity itself . . . loses its meaning as a fixed construct, and sexuality is performed as a historical process that is both social
and psychic" (Hart, 130). Investigating the performances of Split Britches and at WOW cafe, Case articulates what she believes is happening currently (from 1996) in the field with respect to the notion of lesbian theatre practice. She cites Hart and Peggy Phelan’s essay “Queerer Than Thou: Being and Deb Margolin,” which “dismantles critical attempts to secure lesbian as an identity. They raise the sore scepter of exclusivity, ‘queer border patrols,’ as they put it, to unsettle the earlier analyses” (Case, 15). The notion of the exclusivity of boundaries becomes replaced by notions of fluidity in terms of identity. “As lesbian ‘identity’ is troubled by an insistence on more complex and fluid processes of visibility and the initial stage of lesbian theory retreats behind (some of us), the limits, the boundaries of what constitutes lesbian become more intriguing” (Case, 15). Identities fixed in gender and sexuality are increasingly scrutinized.

This point is exactly where the liberation of the femme in female camp performance begins her dance, a “dance” or “position” (with connotations of movement that conventional notions of a position seem to exclude) which undermines identities fixed in gender and sexuality. The “complex and fluid processes of visibility” in Drag King performance in this chapter will exemplify the contemporary movement towards the “queering” of gender performance through complex butch and femme performance strategies. Citations against camp performance in lesbian and feminist theory are articulated within a paradigm bound to problematic identities, both lesbian and feminist identities. This, compounded along with misinterpretations of
what constitutes camp practice, limits the articulation for gender play and performance. The notion of genders and sexualities will be developed in this chapter along with the terms butch-femme and female camp. Camp is problematically bound up with ideas which regard it “as a discourse [which] is both ironically and paradoxically the discourse of hom(m)osexuality, that is male sexuality” (Davy, 243). I will explore layering the codes of gender for play in a Drag King camp performance which resists hegemonic and exclusionary interpretations of lesbian and feminist identities and performances.

Contemporary feminist theatre theory and lesbian critical theory abound with citations and admonitions against camp practice in feminist discourse. The call for a unique practice and discourse which will articulate a “unique" sensibility of lesbianism and feminism strictly forbids the perceived binary and historical implications of camp for lesbian/feminist practice. Jill Dolan (“The Dynamics of Desire" 1988), Alisa Solomon (“It’s Never too Late to Switch” 1993, “The WOW Cafe” 1996), Kate Davy (“Fe/male Impersonation: The Discourse of Camp” 1992) and Sue-Ellen Case (“Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” 1989, “From Split Subject to Split Britches” 1989, Split Britches 1996) are critics who have theorized the work at WOW Cafe and the performances of Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw of Split Britches in terms of lesbian performance practices. The work of these critics exemplifies the range and contemporary historical evolution of the field and at WOW in terms of lesbian visibility in performance and, “how a lesbian address is constituted, the unique nature of a lesbian audience reception, the function of butch-
femme role playing, and the lesbian uses of camp" (Case 1996, 11). WOW has become an important site for the investigation of lesbian performance practice and reception, where the lesbian paradigm is itself contested in the theoretical work of these and other critics. Camp, however, assumes a precarious position within feminist and lesbian critical theory.

Jill Dolan and Kate Davy make it clear that there is no room for camp in feminism. Dolan perceives drag and camp to be "trivial" and citing Caryl Churchill's Cloud 9, considers a feminist application of gender play to be superior (Dolan 1992, 7). Harkening back to the "Woman as Other" paradigm, there is no place for the contradictions that are straining to play out in a female camp because, Davy writes, "Both female and male impersonation foreground the male voice, and either way, women are erased. Moreover, it is in the discourse of camp humor that female impersonation is firmly embedded" (Davy 1992, 234). While camp humor does have a tradition of female impersonation, there is a tradition of male impersonation as well, and while both of these performances often have traditionally confined themselves to cross-dressing and parody, likely to result in the reinscription of dominant stereotypes and "role-playing," it is entirely too general and dismissive to say that camp humour is defined or limited by these types of performances.

While Susan Sontag wants a "[c]amp theoretically detachable — and therefore already detached — from gay men" (Miller 1989, 93) theorists like Kate Davy, Jill Dolan etc. want to deny a female camp in favor of an
exclusively male camp and a separate lesbian language/world view. Like Sontag they want to maintain a separate or detached articulation that is "much more" (Sontag) or "Other" (Davy) than camp: "Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste" (Sontag, 290-91). The difference is that many contemporary feminist theorists regard camp as the exclusive property of a specifically gay male articulation while Sontag denies exclusivity to the detriment of any meaningful connection at all. Davy and Dolan deny the presence of camp outright in female form because of camp’s implied enmeshment with gay male culture and expression. It is because of this connection between gay male culture and camp that they want to name what might appear to be female camp, something else. Feminist discourse and a "female language" must not be connected in any way to the gay male form of expression — camp.

The outrage that D.A. Miller exhibits in his criticism of Sontag — "As early as her first page, this author has justified her phobic de-homosexualization of [c]amp as the necessary condition for any intelligent discourse on the subject," (Miller, 93) — points to the necessity of validating and recognizing the "gay lineage of [c]amp," (Miller, 92) but does the appropriation or invention of a camp interface ("interface" as an interactive term implicating the performer and spectator in a circuit effect of meaning) outside male homosexuality necessarily mutually exclude camp’s roots? Miller criticizes Sontag’s "detached" perspective which excludes the "necessity" for the relation between camp and gay male culture. Recognizing
the importance of validating the historical genesis of camp and gay male culture, should the validation or recognition of those roots mean that camp is the exclusive property of gay men, a discourse which solely articulates a hegemonic experience of "male gayness" as theorists such as Dolan and Davy propose?

Sue-Ellen Case is an example of a feminist theorist who bridges the worlds of feminist discourse and camp, paying particular attention to the specific gay male history of camp while exploring camp's potential as a useful articulation for others. In her essay "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" she says, "The camp success in ironizing and distancing the regime of realist terror mounted by heterosexist forces has become useful as a discourse and style for other marginal factions" (Case, 288). Davy takes issue with Case's project to use camp as a strategy in combination with the discourse of the butch-femme couple "to provide the liberation of the feminist subject" (Case 286, Davy 243) because according to Davy,

[Case] invokes camp as a 'discourse,' instead of merely using its salient elements, the baggage of camp discourse is imbricated in her argument. The result is that the subject position she constructs does not walk out of the hom(m)osexual frame of reference as effectively as it could, for camp discourse is both ironically and paradoxically the discourse of hom(m)osexuality, that is, male sexuality. (Davy, 243)
Jack Babuscio, in his essay “Camp and the Gay Sensibility” (1977) makes a strong and clear connection between gay male culture and camp. Camp humour, connected to gay male culture, is not merely about female impersonation and, moreover, maintains the potential for further use and manifestation. “[Camp] humour constitutes the strategy of camp: a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity. This humour takes several forms. Chief of these is bitter-wit . . .” (47). Babuscio argues that because camp combines fun and earnestness, it runs the risk of being considered not serious at all. Usually overlooked by critics of the gay sensibility is camp’s strategy of irony. Camp, through its introduction of style, aestheticism, humour and theatricality, allows us to witness ‘serious’ issues with temporary detachment, so that only later, after the event, are we struck by the emotional and moral implications of what we have almost passively absorbed. The ‘serious’ is, in fact, crucial to camp. (48-49)

Quoting a character from a Christopher Isherwood novel, Babuscio gives us a sense of the meaning behind camp’s humour:

You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously; you’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it. You’re expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance. (Babuscio 49)
Davy maintains that camp cannot serve "lesbian women engaged in theatrical endeavours in the same ways it serves gay men" because camp adheres to masculine-feminine juxtaporitions and a "fierce binarism that drives masculine-feminine heterogendering, a binarism that, by its very nature, subsumes and erases women" (235). Davy's project, "to delineate the dangers of this same discourse for articulating a feminist subject position vis-à-vis the dynamics of butch-femme gender play in lesbian theatre" (235) is based on a limited reading of gay male camp. Limiting her definition of camp performance to that played out in a 1928 essay written by Jean Cocteau describing the "drag act" of Vander Clyde as Barbette, which is read by Davy as enacting the role of the "Other," equating the "illusion of woman" with "absent presence" (236), she finds that "the strict polarization of man/woman in heterogendering precludes the possibility of reading men in drag 'wholistically.' Female impersonation provides, in short, a seemingly endless source of fascination because, unlike male impersonation, the man who appropriates his 'opposite' is not simultaneously effaced by it" (237). The other example Davy uses links the effect found in Cocteau to the performances of Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company in 1973, specifically Camille based on the Alexandre Dumas fils work, La Dame aux Camélias, and the 1937 film version starring Greta Garbo. Describing Ludlam's performance as Marguerite, Davy says that "although Ludlum mostly played the role for comic effect, he also played it earnestly in moments where he milked the pathos of a scene, hushing the audience, to seduce them into 'seeing' a
woman as a kind of 'set up' for moments when he dropped the character altogether to deliver a line or two as his actor/playwright/gay-male self” (emphasis added, 237). Falling into an inner/outer distinction that “stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject” (Butler 1990a, 134) Davy resorts to a binary, locating the “self” within the body and reads the body as a reflection of the “truth” of that self. Like Butler’s critique of gender identity where the male body should contain a masculine self and the female body a feminine self and that each body’s desires will be regulated by the compulsory practice of heterosexuality, Davy reads a compulsory gay-male self, in the body located in camp performance that is stable (read: stuck in gay-maleness) a performance which is already based on a “fierce binarism that drives masculine-feminine heterogendering” (Davy, 235).

Femme-Feminist

Lois Weaver’s femme-feminist performance is a starting point towards unraveling the meanings behind the contempt for camp in feminist discourse. Lisa M. Walker’s analysis of “visible differences” in feminist, lesbian and gay theory, in “How To Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are” (1993), takes her cue from Teresa de Lauretis who suggests that

feminist critical theory as such begins when the feminist critique of sociocultural formations . . . becomes conscious of itself and turns inward . . . to question its own relation to or possible
complicity with those ideologies, its own heterogeneous body of writing and interpretations, their basic assumptions and terms, and the practice which they enable and from which they emerge. (de Lauretis 1990, 138)

Within this context I address how Lois Weaver’s gender performance disturbs the notion of “feminist” before approaching the term “feminist discourse” and challenges what it means to be a “feminist” at the outset. I examine Weaver’s “femme-feminist” camp performance in relation to the contradictions this poses for a normative feminist position and the hidden assumptions making claims for a feminist language outside camp performance entails. This section creates a liberating departure for recovering camp in feminism and feminist discourse. I will dismantle the notion of a universal woman that is immediately “erased” and “voiceless” by virtue of her address (Davy) and locate the feminist subject position in the gaps of genders that exist for women in camp performance. If the feminist is camp could not a camp feminism articulate her experience?

Feminism carries with it certain specific meanings for women in terms of femininity and sexuality. In “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” (1989) Sue-Ellen Case makes this clear in her account of how the lesbian has been closeted in feminism, specifically the lesbian who identifies her cultural roots with the tradition of butch-femme role-playing. Case recounts the historical significance of the “so-called lesbian liberatory organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB)” whose aims were intertwined with those of the early “women’s
movement" (Case 284). Early (1972) accounts "proudly exhibit the way in which the DOB moved away from the earlier bar culture and its symbolic systems to a more dominant identification and one that would appease the feminist movement. DOB's goal was to erase butch-femme behavior, its dress codes, and lifestyle from the lesbian community and to change lesbians into lesbian feminists" (284). While sexuality has apparently been recovered from the feminist closet (butch-femme role-playing and the call for a "lesbian world view" rumble between the pages of most contemporary feminist work on gender, i.e. Davy, Dolan, Case, De Lauretis), the performance of femininity, sexuality and feminism has yet to be discovered for female camp.

I have been attracted to the commercial imagery of femininity from a young age. I just don't feel that I could ever keep my fingernails clean enough or keep my roots done enough to really pass. – Lois Weaver, "Femme Feminist". (McAuley, 49)

Lois Weaver, founder of the theatre company Split Britches (with Peggy Shaw), exemplifies what I call female-to-female-feminist-cross-dressing, a type of drag and a crossing made possible because of several apparent and ironical contradictions. Within the drag paradigm, I am re-appropriating the term cross-dressing metaphorically to suggest a crossing-over to something other than what is expected or within the boundaries of a contained self. I locate opposites within the paradigm of woman in Female Camp
performance. Opposites are not comprised of "this or that" in a possible range for gender performance but are combined in a "this and that" fashion. Further, if opposites exist outside the traditional binary imperative and within models that used to be complete and non-negotiable (the term "woman" has been signified this way) cross-dressing becomes a multiple act and there are multiple forms/bodies to which one can cross over. Using the example of female-to-female cross-feminist-dressing as exemplified by Lois Weaver in the article "Femme Feminist" the term moves into a new dimension and is combined with the term drag which, as explored in chapter two, more fully embraces the multidimensional layers of camp performance. (The new post-cross-dressing term moves into a further dimension in the last chapter.) The unexpected is located immediately in the notion of "female-to-female" where simply being female does not signal something complete or whole. A range of possibilities exist for the female outside of the female position she currently occupies. This immediately contextualizes female impersonation differently from what is usually implied by the term (i.e. male-to-female impersonation). "Feminist-cross-dressing" assumes that there are certain criteria associated with the term feminist that can be contradicted and appear incongruous. Esther Newton (1972) and Jack Babuscio (1977) agree that "irony is the subject matter of camp and refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association" (Babuscio, 41).
The title of the essay, "Femme Feminist," capitalizes on the apparent contradiction between the notion of femme and feminist, and the essay investigates the "dichotomy of being a femme and a feminist. . . . She likes make-up, push-up bras, high heels and glamour, but today she is wearing jeans, sweatshirt and biker's jacket. Her suicide blond hair is pinned up, although several strands have broken loose. The effect is slightly disheveled, sexy, almost Monroe-ish" (48). Not only can cultural prescriptions for femininity be negotiated, but the idea that it is a "contradiction" for a "feminist" to be "femme" implies that there are codes for gender performance within the feminist paradigm. To identify with being a feminist and to be perceived as being a feminist means to dress, act and look a specific way. Constructing this "way" differently and naming this re-construction an act of subversion is evidence that within the realm of "female," specific codes for gender behaviour exist. To cross-over or metaphorically cross-dress one does not have to don the apparel of the opposite sex. To be a feminist is not to exceed specific parameters for femininity, but to be female in culture mandates a feminine imperative. Hence, the schizophrenic negotiating of self as female within the feminist paradigm. Weaver says, "I've only really come out as a femme within the last eight years. I consciously portray that and try to reclaim that image and celebrate it while subverting it. One of the ways I do that is to not complete the perfect picture, so that the image slips slightly." (48)

The image slipping slightly, the act of invoking the referent while blasting the codes implicated by it, signals the camp effect of her "portrayal."
Esther Newton describes camp as a “double inversion” that says “appearance is an illusion” (101). “[Traditionally] drag says “My ‘outside’ appearance is feminine, but my essence ‘inside’ (the body) is masculine.” At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion: “My appearance ‘outside’ (my body, my gender) is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ (myself) is feminine” (Newton 103; parenthesis are Butler’s, 1990a, 137). In Weaver’s case her outside appearance, “femme” contradicts her intellectual (inside) position as “feminist”. At the same time her female body appears to be congruous with her inside because femininity appears to conform with a traditional description of “woman”. The problem of such a conflation is foregrounded when “woman” articulates herself as “feminist”. There is no essential “inside” referent which is stable or secure.

Weaver camps her femme-feminist performance. She actively plays with the contradictions of her appearance, and articulates the empowering position she occupies through gender play, “I like to play femme. And to play against that image of being a blonde bimbo by being highly analytical and intellectual and shockingly and aggressively verbal. I think there are people who are intrinsically butch or intrinsically femme, but I also think that all of us are both of these things. I came out as a femme because, basically I have a femme nature, but I think I could choose to be butch, and am butch in lots of ways. I’ve been through a stage of having my hair very, very short, not wearing make-up, dressing mostly in jeans and T-shirts.” (48) While Weaver identifies personally with a “femme nature” the codes she plays with, in
relation to ideas of the term feminist, destabilize the notion of that “nature” as fixed.

Drag is the interplay of contradictions found in the gaps of gender performance which exist on multiple levels. “Inside” and “outside” can no longer contain or describe the performance of self in feminist drag. This is further exemplified by the notion of “passing” as it is applied to a female regarding her femininity (“I have been attracted to the commercial imagery of femininity from a young age. I just don’t feel that I could ever keep my fingernails clean enough or keep my roots done enough to really pass”). Walker notes that

while privileging visibility can be politically and rhetorically effective, it is not without problems. Within the constructs of a given identity that invests certain signifiers with political value, figures that do not present those signifiers are often neglected. Because subjects who can “pass” exceed the categories of visibility that establish identity, they tend to be regarded as peripheral to the understanding of marginalization. (868)

As I have indicated, there are certain criteria for “passing” as a feminist. Because femininity passes in terms of the presumed heterosexual mandate and affiliation with the dominant culture, the femme, by extension, is overlooked and made peripheral. Likewise, camp’s association with the femme renders it as “peripheral to the understanding of marginalization.” The contempt for female camp can be found in the femme’s assumed peripheral
status with respect to the prominent issues in feminist discourse which are entrenched in attempting to subvert the dominant positioning of women in culture which the femme is presumed to uphold by virtue of her relation to femininity and "passing." However, in femme performance, femininity and female are no longer bound as one, but are negotiated against one another on a terrain of perceived self-identity. The site for resistance to the body's gender narrative takes place in the contested terrain called self, a self and body consistently interpolated by the signifying term "female." Because the body has been "the site [read: sight] of dissonant and denaturalized performances" (Butler 1990a, 146), it has rendered "invisible the femme's challenge to the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Walker 883).

Walker notes that

the femme can be read as the 'blind spot' in Butler's notion of gender performance that will 'construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction' (138; [Walker's] emphasis). The femme might be considered the and that cannot be contained in Butler's either/or paradigm; she both constructs the illusion of an interior gendered self (she looks like a straight woman) and parodies it (what you see is not what you get). Bringing the femme to the foreground elucidates the limitations of the expressive model of gender/sexual identity. (Walker, 883)
Positioning the work at WOW Cafe within the realm of parody—"parody is the staple of WOW productions," taking on a variety of forms "from reworkings of classical texts to spoofs on genres such as the detective film, the romance novel, and the television talk show, soap opera, or sitcom," (231) Davy argues that "impersonation is the arena in which camp falls short as a definitive characteristic of most WOW work. The butch of butch-femme gender play is engaged in lesbian representation, not male impersonation" (234). Male impersonation becomes a criterion for reading camp performance and the butch (the femme is surreptitiously unarticulated/active) manifests something beyond the demonized "male impersonation." Davy also maintains that a "heterosexual imperative" drives the narratives of camp and that these were not adopted by WOW performers.

The aligning of camp with cross dressing does not account for the fact that wearing the clothing of the opposite sex does not automatically signal a camp performance. Most criticism of female camp does not distinguish between works that are camp/drag and those which are parody/cross-dressing, which do reinscribe and evoke the traditional positioning of women. Lumping all attempts at gender subversion into one category diminishes the success of works that are indeed camp. As early as 1972, Esther Newton makes a distinction between "the drag queen" and "the camp" (104-111):
Both the drag queen and the camp are expressive performing roles, and both specialize in transformation. But the drag queen is concerned with masculine-feminine transformation, while the camp is concerned with might be called a philosophy of transformations and incongruity . . . the drag queen simply expresses the incongruity while the camp actually uses it to achieve a higher synthesis. (105)

I would align Newton's terms the following way: “the camp” belongs to the category of camp/drag and “the drag queen” belongs to the category of conventional parody/cross-dressing. Davy locates male impersonation in the parodic territory of Newton's drag queen and defines this exclusively as camp.

Moving into the arena of drag king performance, I will show that drag is not about cross-dressing or donning the costume of the “opposite” gender. There is a rainbow of gender play in camp performance available to the female performer. As I have shown in Lois Weaver's femme-feminist performance, female-to-female drag explodes the notion that one is “cross-dressed” only if one dons the apparel of the “opposite sex”. To argue that because camp humour has a tradition of female impersonation (male-to-female) it is not “applicable” or useful, even “dangerous” (“women are erased”) for females is to misread its subversive potential. What is not considered is the subversive potential for females impersonating females which negotiates “male impersonation,” a “heterosexual imperative,” and
the exploding/expanding signification for a butch to drag as a femme, or a butch to drag as an effeminate gay male in Drag King "male impersonation."

Davy’s notion that camp humour is entrenched in female impersonation is also based on the “fact” of the “scarcity” of male impersonation from Newton’s description of the field in 1972 (Davy, 235). She says that “there is no institutionalized paradigm for reading male impersonation. Female impersonation, on the other hand, has a long, rich history . . . female impersonation, while it certainly says something about women, is primarily about men, addressed to men, and for men. Male impersonation has no such familiar institutionalized history in which women impersonating men say something about women” (233-4). Roberta Best argues that

without the same extensive and established history as gay male camp, the lesbian equivalent is often dismissed as not existing in its own right, or more often confused with butch/femme role playing. . . . Theatrical groups like the Clichettes have used male drag as a means of parodying gender, but until now there hasn’t been a lesbian equivalent to the full-out, over the top, ready-for-Vegas Donna Summer and Madonna lip sync shows. . . . (1995, 14)

Positioning the Drag Kings outside of “gender parody” and into camp performance, Best recognizes that the signification of female to male and female to female performance signals that “‘drag’ is different than cross-
dressing in both its attitude and aesthetic. What differentiates Drag King-ism from cross-dressing (and to a lesser extent gay male drag which is often reverential of the stars it copies) is the use of parody and kitsch to question and often ridicule the iconic status of 70’s and 80’s performers and sex symbols” (15). Best notes that “much of lesbian feminist theory in pop culture and cinema studies is based on re-vision” (15). The significance of temporality in camp performance is foregrounded in drag king performance. The Drag Kings represent a theoretical re-visioning, “articulating what used to be the “hidden ‘queer’ subtext in films, TV shows, etc. that we watched as kids and found resonance with” (15).10

The Greater Toronto Drag King Society (dk) was founded in 1995 by Rose Perri and Joy Lachica in Toronto, Ontario. My research and investigation has enabled me to compile a contemporary “history” of the group’s activities, performances and includes a theoretical analysis which includes reception.11 In 1992, Perri and Lachica would invite unsuspecting dinner guests to their home to watch them perform impromptu drag numbers with dessert. They moved their experimentation with Female Camp (Lachica performs primarily female-to-male and Rose performs female-to-female drag) to Buddies in Bad Times Theatre where they participated in events such as Strange Sisters (November 25, 1994), Tinsel & Trash (Christmas 1994), and Viva Vulva, where Lachica and a friend performed nun drag to Sister Janet Mead’s “Our Father” tune. These performances led to the first Village People performance at Buddies Tea Dance in the Spring of 1995 which inspired the
curious attention of the media. Encouraged by the positive response and overwhelming interest of women wanting to perform drag, Lachica and Perri decided to form a troupe and organized its first meeting to be held at The Bulldog Bar on Church Street in Toronto on May 17, 1995. This meeting inspired a performance at Woody’s bar on Church Street. Offers to appear in films such as Keith Cole’s Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman (Abesamis, 1997) and Ruth Wiston’s PINCO Triangle set in Sudbury at the Big Nickel were soon after accepted and the first Drag King Invasion on June 29, 1995 at College Street’s El Convento Rico took place to a sold out and very enthusiastic crowd. On lesbian and gay pride day 1995, the Drag Kings performed to an estimated crowd of 100,000 people on the main stage which hosted well known performers including Lorraine Segato, Lea Delaria and Carole Pope. In the Summer of 1995, the Drag Kings graced a Celebrity Bingo Fund-Raiser, opened for the band Claudia’s Cage at the Horseshoe Tavern on Queen Street and for Carole Pope at the El Mocambo on Spadina Avenue. A rehearsal space was secured at Nightwood Theatre and the Drag Kings agreed to perform at Nightwood’s fund-raiser as the main entertainment. The Drag King’s second major show, A Drag King Invasion II took place on November 24, 1995 at Toronto’s Opera House Theatre, featuring the “granddaddy” of drag kings Shelly Mars from New York City. The range of media coverage spanned press, radio and television. The Women’s Television Network documented the preparation for the show and interviewed the performers about Female
Camp. This piece was featured along with an interview with Kate Bornstein, situating the success of Toronto’s Drag King Society internationally.14

The Greater Toronto Drag King Society is composed of women who perform in drag, female-to-male and female-to-female. Their aliases run the gamut, from Buck Nakid, Sure Shot Eddie, M-Ann Murray, and Don Ho to Cowboy Barbie, Jill Jolie, Natasha la Slasha and Mama Tallulah. They invoke the presence of Donny and Marie, Captain and Tenille, Placido Domingo, John Denver, Freddy Mercury, Barry Manilow, Axl Rose and Slash. They are women, lesbian, bisexual, queer, straight, butch, femme and gradations in between and beyond, who perform gender.

The Drag King performances exhibit the many distinct and unique layers and levels of transformation and meaning that female to male and female to female imitation and drag occupy in performance culture and expand the parameters of butch-femme play. In performance a dialogue exists between past and present, a loving nostalgia for a star, moment or time which can be reinvented, reabsorbed, recycled and ironically engaged in camp performance.

Temporally, dk’s performance choices span years and generations performing “types” already established within popular culture from the 1940s through the 1990s. If Sue-Ellen Case visits the 1940’s and 1950’s for appropriate examples of butch-femme play, the Drag Kings hyperbolize those examples by crossing referents from past and present echoing Sontag’s notion that “the canon of [c]amp can change. Time has a great deal to do with it” (285). The
drag kings perform hyper-narratives, unsettling and exploding any realist tone, taking drag king performance beyond the parameters of lip-synching and traditional butch-femme roles by collapsing space along with time.

A “serious” critique, shaped by aesthetics and artifice, defeats the “reign of realism” through “wit, irony, and the distancing of straight reality and its conventions” (Case 287). The Bee Gees perform “(K)nights on Broadway” while their dead brother (H)andy Gibb is resurrected amidst a contemporary tableau of scary drug dealers who lurk in the background. A 1990’s “Marry” Manilow sings the 1970’s story of the 1940’s “Copacabanna” while femme Lola spins between her love Tony and stalker Rico in a cabaret lounge on a 1995 stage: “that was thirty years ago, when there used to be a show. Now it’s a disco....”

The Drag Kings layer their performances with contemporary references. While temporality and nostalgia are major components of camp, the contemporary glam-rock performances of Axl Rose and Slash from Guns n’ Roses resonate with over the top and constructed present day glam-star images, ripe for the camping. Axl is performed in his infamous homophobic “Nobody knows I’m a lesbian” T-shirt and simulates fellatio on his guitar-thrashing sidekick Slash. Star-types formed by popular culture, types that embrace the iconic status of the Rock Star, the Femme Fatal, the Macho Man, the Country and Western Star, are enmeshed with gender expectations and formulae which can be mimicked and exceeded in imitation such that this
imitation foregrounds the construction of gender through multi-layered butch and femme play.

While Davy takes issue with the perceived binary implications of camp performance, she situates her own argument in a position of lesbian theatre versus gay male camp:

Butch-femme as a signifying practice in lesbian theater differs from male drag performance in that it dismantles the construction ‘woman’ and challenges male sexuality as the universal norm. . . . Positioned inside a lesbian discourse that is every bit as artificial as camp in its gender play of phallocratic fictions, the butch-femme subject position, like its original referent in the butch-femme couple, is more lethal to the hegemonic discourses than Charles Ludlam’s Marguerite and Charles Busch’s “lesbians of sodom” (244).

The call for a “unique” (read: Other, fixed) and “lethal” lesbian articulation for the fixed butch-femme configuration in a site that is “every bit as artificial as camp” but is not camp is echoed by others.

In her essay “Girls with Gun Glamour,” Paula Graham asks the question, “Can lesbians be camp?” and examines whether lesbians need to define their own language (1994, 21-3). Graham acknowledges that films like Thelma & Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991) and Sigourney Weaver’s character in Aliens (James Cameron, 1986) while popular with lesbians, would be a stretch to call camp. The conclusion seems to be that if these examples do not fit into
a camp model and these examples are the ones that resonate with lesbian audiences, then camp is not a "lesbian language" and a separate model or language must be “discovered.” The solution ignores the possibility that there are camp models with the potential to articulate not only a "lesbian language" but desire on an entirely new scale. Drag King performance blurs the lines of sexuality and desire through a distinctly subversive and layered gender performance, where "identification" with, and desire for, the performer transcends common preconceptions about sexuality. For example, lesbians performing as gay males in a male gay bar become the object of desire in a manner which seems to flip female impersonation – men performing as women – on its head. When the Greater Toronto Drag King Society performed at the gay male Woody's Bar in Toronto on March 26, 1995, desire in terms of gender performance and sexuality became apparently ambiguous. At the performance at El Convento Rico "the already contrived hyper masculinity of clone boys The Village People drew many ogles from my male counterparts," said reviewer Roberta Best (15).

The Dynamic Duo

Sue Ellen Case’s essay “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” focuses on the feminist subject, “endowed with the agency for political change, located among women, outside the ideology of sexual difference, and thus the social institution of heterosexuality” (1989, 283). Case champions the lesbian roles of the “butch” and “femme” as a “dynamic duo” capable of inhabiting a strong
feminist subject position together within the context of camp performance. Case says, "You can’t have one without the other" (283). This section will show the boundaries delimiting the role of the butch-femme to be convention. Not only can you have "one without the other" but you can have one and be the other within a unique Drag King camp performance which destabilizes rigid categorizations of gender and sexuality.

Case critically recycles masquerade theory drawing attention to the "passive" nature of the women implicated by it, searching for something more active in terms of representation such as de Lauretis’s feminist subject or the notion of butch-femme. She returns to Joan Riviere’s 1929 ground-breaking essay “Womanliness as a Masquerade.” Riviere’s theory is a reading of the behavior of an intellectual heterosexual woman who had become frigid. Riviere sees the woman as having a wish for masculinity which causes her to don the “mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men” (Riviere, 303). Riviere believed that for a woman to read an academic paper before a professional association was to exhibit in public her “possession of her father’s penis, having castrated him” (Riviere, 305-6). This castration resides in her intellectual proficiency and to compensate for this she dons the mask of womanliness. For Riviere, womanliness and the masquerade are the same thing. All womanliness is a masquerade to hide the fact that they have taken their father’s penis. She notes a distinction between heterosexual and homosexual women. The heterosexual woman cannot claim the penis openly, but through reaction formations. The homosexual
woman, however, openly displays her possession of the penis and counts on
the male's recognition of defeat.

Case notes this kind of masquerade is played out in butch-femme
roles, particularly as constituted in the 1940's and 1950's. She says,

If one reads them from within Riviere's theory, the butch . . .
displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on
the compensatory masquerade of womanliness. The femme,
however, foregrounds her masquerade by playing to a butch,
another woman in a role; likewise, the butch exhibits her penis
to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration. .
. . [T]he fictions of penis and castration become ironized and
'camped up.' Unlike Riviere's patient, these women play on the
phallic economy rather than to it. (291)

Case likens the butch/femme roles to character construction and notes
that they have a more active quality than what Riviere calls a reaction-
formation.

[T]hese roles qua roles lend agency and self-determination to the
historically passive subject, providing her with at least two
options for gender identification and with the aid of camp, an
irony that allows her perception to be constructed from outside
ideology, with a gender role that makes her appear as if she is
inside of it. (292)
While the butch-femme roles Case describes can be found in camp performance effecting a distance, irony and reappropriation of the dominant gender paradigm, her description of the roles the butch and femme play freezes them in permanent configurations and categories. They are frozen by a mandatory prescription for homosexuality and a bound butch-femme identification. The liberatory nature of a feminist subject who is bound to another permanently in order to effect so-called "agency" is questionable.

Bound to one another, the butch is the privileged partner, the one who is visible or "seen" in Lesbian discourse. "The glorification of the butch as authentic lesbian is based on her 'blatant' representation of sexual deviance, and this in turn implies ambiguity and confusion around the femme's sexual identity. The femme's adaptation of what has been historically defined as a 'feminine' sexual style is tacitly constructed as evidence of her desire to pass for straight and not of her desire for other women" (Walker, 882). Drag King performance moves beyond the simple description of butch-femme "role-playing" to locate a feminist subject position in a terrain where one is not bound to the other as the only way of escaping "reaction-formationst" (Riviere) or passive spectatorial positions (Doane).

Drag King performance challenges the obstacles for femme performance in films where women "cross over," where "[t]he femme, is once again invisible as a lesbian in a community where, as commentator on lesbian culture Pat Califia puts it, 'butches think of femmes as straight girls taking a sapphic vacation from serving the patriarchy’" (Walker, 10). Graham
refers to the films, *Red Sonja* (Richard Fleischer, 1985), *Supergirl* (Jeannot Szwarc, 1984) and *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968) as examples in which a "lesbian witch-queen threatens to destroy the world by overheating a talisman of female power. The Amazon trashes the dyke, destroys the talisman, and restores 'normality'" (23). Normality is situated within the perceived confines of the feminine "normal," supporting a heterosexual patriarchal imperative, and so, demonized. There are no parameters for the lesbian spectator to negotiate femininity or the femme outside this model.

The character Sandi from the (contemporary camp) musical film *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1977) complicates the binaristic implications of readings such as Graham's. In the film there is a split. Using Graham's Amazon/Witch Queen model for instance, the feminine Amazon is presented as the Virgin "Sandi" and the Witch-Queen/Whore is presented as "Pinky Tuscadero." In order to win the man she loves, and "defend patriarchy," Sandi transforms into the Whore at the film's conclusion, conflating the split onto the same site. Where it appeared she was defending the patriarchal order, "against a sex-mad witch," Sandi, in the tradition of female-female drag, appropriates and subverts dominant prescriptions for the Virgin and the Whore in femme drag.

Recognizing the subversive potential for characters like Sandi, the Greater Toronto Drag King Society creates a performance which challenges the split and the heterosexual paradigm in the following way. Drag King femme performer Louise Batsch plays Olivia Newton John playing the film
character Sandi in *Grease*, and brings to her performance not only recognizable aspects of her own femme-play and femme-star (Newton-John\(^7\)) but of the femme-character Newton-John adopts in the film. Louise Batsch, the performer, has a physique which lends itself to the Barbie “look;” tall, blond and curvy, which she camps up with makeup, accessories and attitude. Louise includes “Barbie business” throughout her performance where “good-girl” sweetness is contained/constrained by a leather jacket, blond wig, high heels and tight pants (“bad girl”), aspects of the film character’s transformation from femme-goody two shoes to femme-whore in the film’s finale, which are negotiated against one another visually.\(^16\) A tension between the layers of femme-play is heightened by the spectator’s awareness that Louise is a visibly pierced S/M leather femme, a seeming contradiction in terms, but which is indicative of the levels of gender play at work. The levels of femme play are woven together in a patchwork characterization. The result: a complex female camp and gender performance of Louise Batsch, Olivia Newton-John, Sandi and Barbie. A femme dragging as femme heightens feminine qualities in a self-referential way such that through the use of irony, parody and kitsch, she foregrounds the construction of femininity, referring back to her own femme gender play destabilizing the “divisions” and “disorders” prescribed upon her. Revisiting Case’s reading of the butch-femme roles in masquerade, Louise does not need to play *to* a butch to foreground the masquerade, she need only play to her own contradictions,
tensions and multi-layeredness. She always has the option to play with a butch if she so desires.

"Camp has been a means of self-invention . . . the nods and winks which communicate the 'in' joke cement a sub-culture, turning heterosexual presumption on its head and reversing the polarity of heterosexism. In this basic sense, 'camp' will be pretty familiar to most lesbians" (Graham, 21). Camp reverses the polarity of heterosexism. The concept of the feminist-subject position (who is "at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that pull, that division, that doubled vision" De Lauretis 1987, 10) which moves the female-subject position beyond biologistic resonance enabling a more active role as "feminist-subject" still needs to account for femininity. Case brings the butch and femme into a feminist subject position but keeps them tied to one another (the butch-femme couple inhabit the subject position together). Moving the femme out of a model where she is described only in relation to the privileged butch into one which is less restrictive enables a Female Camp practice that moves into genders and sexualities. There are multiple positions available, in terms of crossing over. There is no "essential" butch or "essential" femme. In dk performance there is a layering of butch and femme and sexuality.

In dk, personal gender play collides with the roles the performers choose. Identification cannot be contained within the paradigm of Witch-Queen or Amazon, Butch or Femme because of the crossings that take place
beyond that description. While the performers are all women there is a
difference when a butch plays femme and when a femme plays a femme.
Drag or cross-dressing is no longer relegated to dressing up as the opposite
gender. A femme can perform a femme role, which resonates with her own
personal gender play, or she can “cross-over” as butch, destabilizing any set
division between butch and femme. In a dk example of a butch crossing-over
as femme, Joy is a butch who plays Don Ho, Officer Don, John Travolta, Barry
Gibb, Placido Domingo and Donny Osmond. Among these male roles (I say
male and not Butch because she does not play them all as Butch characters)
she also plays femme Jill Jolie, a 70’s type blond bombshell singer. As Officer
Don in the dk’s Village People, Joy’s performance resonates with her gender
performance outside of the shows. She camps up her own butch persona, and
the glam-butch performance strategies of the original all male Village People.
On stage, she wears a dildo, mustache, and cop’s uniform with prominent big
black boots as cues to the dominant male signs in gender play. When she
performs Jill Jolie she is attired in a long blond wig, high heels and sexy low
cut blouse emphasizing her breasts. She informs me that she feels “like a drag
queen” as Jill Jolie.19 Indeed, the signs are so layered at this point that she is a
female, playing a butch, playing a gay man, playing a femme. If she were a
transgendered female the stakes (read: hemline) would be raised so much
higher. The cues for signaling “femme” in Jolie’s case also refer back to Joy
being butch. In a different sort of example, Joy plays Placido Domingo as an
“effeminate” man, again crossing over from any simplification and definition
that male equals butch. Joy is not the genders she plays at – as Jill Jolie, Officer Don or Placido Domingo, as Butch or as Femme. Gender (and butch-femme play) is no longer a binary configuration, with neat divisions and an established referent or Other, where a female simply dresses up in male attire, calls it drag and is "King." She dresses up and in so doing refers back to her own gender play and that of the character she is adopting. Butch and femme are not fixed by any formal description, and identification becomes blurred by the many levels of gender play.

The Greater Toronto Drag King Society’s performances cross the conventional boundaries of gender performance by layering not dividing the codes of femininity and masculinity/butch and femme. “Man-made penises” are literally “openly displayed,” exaggerated and as irreverently discarded. In dk women wear dildos, have breasts and perform “men” and “women.” The butch moves beyond exhibiting “her penis to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration” (Riviere) and the femme moves beyond foregrounding her masquerade by “playing to a Butch” (Case). The Drag Kings perform a melange of genres, genders and sexualities. They can engender their male roles with femme qualities and their female roles with butch qualities. The crossing of butch/femme play becomes multi-layered in several configurations. Best claims that the “funniest moment” for her (at El Convento Rico) was “watching a boyish S&M dyke parody the effeminate masculinity of 70’s heterosexual pop swish Andy Gibb – drag, camp, nostalgia and a fabulously bad satin jump suit all rolled into a three minute pop song.

Now that's entertainment" (Best, 15). A hybrid "M-Ann" Murray sweetly sings about Snowbirds while grabbing her crotch. The Village People sequence includes the S/M leather man played by an S/M lesbian. The love duet between effeminate Placido Domingo and John Denver contains gay and lesbian overtones, that is, the performers (in male attire) gazing into each others eyes are both butch females. Olivia Newton John and John Travolta mimic the hyperbolized and mandatory heterosexual finale from commercial musicals (Grease), and also refer to butch-femme lesbian "play." Rachel Giese, in her article on the Toronto Drag Kings remarks,

In the best style of camp humour, the drag kings poke fun at gender rules while reveling in gender extremes. Drag, for example, takes on a whole new meaning when they dress up as girls. That's right. Female female-impersonators. But note the subversive spin: the rumoured-to-be-gay Anne Murray is performed in a slightly masculine, your-grade-nine-PE-teacher fashion, and a performance of the Osmonds' "I'm A Little Bit Country (. . .I'm A Little Bit Rock 'n' Roll)" takes an incestuous twist when Donny grabs at a coy Marie's butt. (1996, 9)

Donny also peeks up Marie's dress. There is theoretical significance to this act occurring between females. "Peeking signifies not sexual difference (assumed to be anatomical difference), but differences of gender/sexual identity within the category "female," so that it becomes a joke about sameness as much as difference" (Walker, 867).
Conclusion

Butch and Femme players exchange roles and parts, dragging themselves into different roles and crossing the set divisions between Butch and Femme play within their own performance strategies. They engender more than two separate options for gender identification and play on the fictions of gender, genre and sexuality. The Drag King performers exchange body parts and the performance of these parts, within and outside of traditionally assigned male and female roles, confounds traditional notions of gender and implicates the femme in addition to the butch in terms of understanding marginalization in culture. Sexuality is also torn from gender such that it is not immediately secure that a butch performer is a lesbian or a femme performer is not. Desire and sexual identification are tossed in a salad of codes and configurations.

The Drag Kings engender options for gender play which become expansive and effect new perspectives for conventional meanings about “natural gender,” foiling preconceptions about either a lesbian model outside female camp or an exclusive gay male tradition of camp, based on a heterosexual paradigm and located in cross-dressing. They inhabit strong subject positions from which to negotiate fluid gender play enabling a multifarious feminist subject position building upon layers of contested “femininities” more expansively than the “butch-femme economy” (Case), in a female camp practice that moves into notions of genders and sexualities.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 The 1990's debates over identity politics sees post-structuralists such as Judith Butler evacuate agency and the subject position, making the subject into a scenario rather than a character (Case 1996, 14). The subject position derives from Foucault and Althusser whose work on the subject is criticized for denying both agency and gender to the subject (Case 1989, 282). Foucault’s studies on ideology likewise suggest no subject position outside ideology, nor does the subject have the agency to change ideology. Case, de Lauretis and others note that “most of the work on the subject position has only revealed the way in which the subject is trapped within ideology and thus provides no programs for change” (Case 1989, 282). Changing this condition became a priority for feminists and the “common appellation of this bound subject has been the “female subject,” signifying a biological, sexual difference, inscribed by dominant cultural practices. De Lauretis names her subject (one capable of change and of changing conditions) the feminist subject, one who is “at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision” (1987, 10). De Lauretis argues that the previous work on the female subject subsumes her in a heterosexual context and this perpetuates her continuing entrapment: “Because she is still perceived in terms of men and not within the context of other women, the subject in heterosexuality cannot become capable of ideological change” (1987, 17-18).

2 Case takes off from De Lauretis' conclusion by locating the lesbian roles of butch and femme, “as a dynamic duo” capable of inhabiting the feminist subject position together “endowed with the agency for political change, located among women, outside the ideology of sexual difference, and thus the social institution of heterosexuality” (283). The butch and femme are bound to one another to effect this change. The butch-femme couple present further problems for representation. Teresa de Lauretis in “Sexual Indifference and
Lesbian Representation,” (1991) is concerned with lesbian visibility through butch-femme role playing and how it works within the system of representation. “Passing” is an issue that occupies the writing of de Lauretis and much of the other writings in the 1990s, “in critiques both of ‘race’ and sexual orientation,” and which “troubles . . . butch-femme role playing” (Case 1996, 14). De Lauretis asks “while the butch is historically visible, how can the femme be seen? This conundrum is tied to de Lauretis’s other point, which she aims at Kate Davy and Jill Dolan, that ‘lesbian’ cannot ‘be,’ as in an audience of lesbians, but is produced within a scenario of desire” (Case 1996, 14). If the femme “disappears within a heterosexist (‘homosexual’, as de Lauretis puts it) economy of the visible – looks like a straight woman – then seeing her must imply the desire to do so” (Case 14). The nature of the femme’s position within the butch-femme paradigm will be further investigated in this chapter along with possible proliferations for that position.

3 Deb Margolin represents the only “straight” woman in the Split Britches group which begs the question “How is this lesbian theater, with Margolin performing and writing in it? How is it not?” (Case, 15)

4 “Queer” is a term the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community has reappropriated from the cruel and pejorative manner in which it has been used to diminish and abuse homosexual difference. Queer is more fluid than the term “gay” encompassing a range of discourses, gender identities and sexual preferences and practices. For a detailed investigation on the relationship between popular culture and queerness see Alexander Doty, Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture (1993).

5 Located at 330 E. 11th Street in New York City, WOW was founded by Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw in 1980 out of the desire to create a space where women’s theatre companies could perform in the tradition of European women’s theatre festivals (Solomon 1996, 42). The first Women’s One World (WOW) Festival took place in October 1980 (Solomon 1996, 42). In the mid-
1980s, WOW Cafe became an “essentially” separatist collective space which aimed to help women develop their talent and skills outside the “restrictive patriarchal tradition” (Case 1996, 12).

6 In Case’s anthology of the work of Split Britches (1996), she carefully follows the performance practices that are associated with “lesbian” in the work of the critics. A summary of this field survey is useful for situating my analysis of female camp practice: Like Solomon in 1986, Case combines a materialist feminism with strategies of representation, situating the lesbian, “as a social practice, alongside the workings of class and ethnicity within the subject position” (1996, 12). Materialist feminism departs from a sociological analysis where theatre serves a mimetic function for the culture, “into an analysis of representation as a site for the production of cultural meanings that perpetuate conservative gender roles” (Dolan 1996, 95). In 1986 Davy deployed butch-femme practices as a correction of essentialist assumptions and, written in the mid-1980s, “reflects the historical move toward a lesbian critical and social practice that would abandon . . . even attack the tenets of early lesbian feminism” (Case 1986, 13). Developing the focus on butch-femme role playing at WOW, Jill Dolan (1987) moves away from an earlier emphasis on collectivity and aligns ‘lesbian’ with and against gender. Lesbian theory begins to establish itself as distinct from feminism but remains allied with it “in retaining gender as the primary category of oppression and disruption” (Case 1996, 13). Case contextualizes her important 1987 essay “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic” as mobilizing an “attack on homophobia embedded in feminist critical strategies,” which seeks to “explore the performance of seduction rather than gender play. . . . Lesbian, then, appears in the play of seduction, as artifice, through butch-femme role playing” (13). Locating the power of “disruption as agency in the subject position — once collective, and here divided into two reciprocal roles,” (13) Case cites the historical moment of the late 1980s as the movement from gender towards the representation of lesbian sex “when the sex-radical position would finally exit the feminist
discourse, to move into a new theoretical and activist alliance with gay men” (13-4).

7 The historical tradition of male impersonation can be found at various sites including Leslie Feinberg’s investigation in Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul (1996); Ramona Curry’s work on Mae West in Too Much of a Good Thing: Mae West as Cultural Icon (1996); Andrea Weiss’s work on Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich in Vampires and Violets (Penguin, 1992); the life of Radclyffe Hall in Sally Cline’s Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John (1998).

8 Walker summarizes Judith Butler’s strategy for denaturalizing gender identity on p. 883.

9 See Newton’s chapter “Role Models” in Mother Camp (1972).

10 An article entitled “Children’s literature meets gay studies: Camp Culture/A new course dissects the role of childhood sexuality in works by homosexuals,” by Andrea Macdonald (1998), discusses Professor Steven Bruhm’s course on gay and lesbian children’s literature which investigates the intersection of gay and lesbian camp with children’s literature. Bruhm looks at the notion of excess, humour and parody as it has come to be seen as a children’s aesthetic and queer aesthetic. “Camp is often seen to be bitter, hard-edged or just silly and excessive. . . . And of course, our assumption about children is they like the silly and excessive and that something like Pee-wee Herman or even the Wizard of Oz speaks to nothing but the love of fantasy, the love of bright colours, the love of excess.”

11 My perspective has been significantly enriched and expanded by my own involvement as a performer with the group, which I was invited to do as a result of my being present as a researcher at the first official meeting.

12 Please see Appendix “A” for a chronology of performances, media reviews and appearances.
Significantly, Church Street in Toronto, commonly referred to as “the gay ghetto” and Woody’s Bar have traditionally been the site for men to perform drag.

The attention of the media is significant because of the target audience presumed. The range covered FAX on Much Music (music industry related), Ooo La La on City TV (hip fashion), Breakfast Television on City TV which included a live performance of Donny & Marie drag (which broadcasts to persons getting ready for school, work, homemakers, in the early morning), Women’s Television Network (which deals with issues concerning women), The Toronto Sun (photo-shoot located in The Maple Leafs Gardens men’s locker room) to name a few.

Walker and Joan Nestle (“Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s,” 1987) question this term which denies the complexity of butch and femme experience because of the premise that butch and femme are imitative of heterosexual gender roles.

Identification and spectator positions have origins in Mary Ann Doane’s theory from “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” with respect to women appropriating “the gaze for their own pleasure,” (1982, 77) through the concept of the transvestite and the masquerade. Positioning herself as the male viewer (transvestite), the female subject assumes the power of the (male) spectatorial position. Masquerading as a woman, the female subject would “flaunt her femininity, produce herself as an excess of femininity – foreground the masquerade,” and reveal “femininity itself as a mask” (1982, 81). Case notes that the masquerade is “exactly that practiced by the femme – she foregrounds cultural femininity. The difference is that Doane places this role in the spectator position, probably as an outgrowth of the passive object position required of women in the heterosexist social structures. Doane’s vision of the active woman is as the active spectator” (Case, 292).
The rumoured-to-be-bisexual status of the feminine star is another layer resonating with the Drag King’s gender play.

The resonances with Barbie also signal the re-vision and queering effect of childhood. “For many of us who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, a film like Grease is our self-identifying version of The Wizard of Oz” (Best, 15).

Personal interview with Joy Lachica.
CHAPTER IV
Entangled Identities and Cyborg Territories

“In myth the meaning is distorted by the concept”

Roland Barthes, Mythologies (122)

This chapter will focus on hybrid identities and couplings which challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality. I theorize drag as cross-species-dressing where second skins and stitchings fall apart, along with notions of coherent rather than fluid identities. Hybridization and a theoretical notion of the cyborg move into territories which include the conceptual proliferation of identities and sexualities.

Donna Haraway’s 1985 essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” in her groundbreaking book Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, develops a political myth around the image of the cyborg, “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1991a, 149). I will use certain aspects of the notion of the cyborg myth as developed by Haraway and refashion it to open up the theoretical possibilities for breached boundaries in drag. The body is doubled in a vision which questions what counts as the natural body when contemporary technological interventions such as “bodybuilding, colored contact lenses, liposuction” alter its “dimensions and markers” (Balsamo 1997, 1).
The cyborg is a fascinating but until now unexplored application in which to consider hybridization and resistance to fixed identities in drag and camp. I will consider how the individual and social identities of the characters *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, 1989) and *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995) splinter and meld into new meanings and undiscovered territory. The characters expand beyond traditional binaries in their transgression of boundaries by combining perceived opposites such as human and animal, man and woman, human and machine. They disturb normative sexuality; the erotic aspects of cyborg identities undo the “mundane fiction of Man and Woman” (Haraway 1991a, 180). These are examples of couplings which undo heterosexual structures of desire, located in the fusions of human and animal/animal and machine. I am regarding cyborg identity as a subversive celebration of illegitimate fusions: “the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire . . . and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind” (1991a, 176).

I will examine the sexual practice of consensual sadomasochism (S/M) as a parodic structuring device in the film *Batman Returns* and explore the meanings which make S/M a cyborg practice within the film. Ann McClintock’s essay “Maid to Order: Commercial S/M and Gender Power” in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* (1993) will be used as an intertext to establish the meanings various S/M scenes connote. This is useful for
understanding how gendered notions of power are played out in S/M’s performative practices. In this context McClintock’s essay highlights my own analysis regarding the characters’ relationships in Batman Returns. I will explore how within a camp context the signs and scenarios of S/M are parodied and rendered hyperbolic. S/M is parodied by attaching its signs to superheroes, Batman and Catwoman, characters which are established in popular culture in relation to notions of fantasy and play. This section will show that within S/M’s context notions of power and domination are played out in reversals. Brought into a camp context there is a doubling effect of those reversals. Further, in relation to parody, we are not watching people play out S/M scenes and roles. We are watching cross-species-superheroes who intermingle qualities of animality, bestiality and sexuality. I will explore the connections that certain S/M fetish-wear has with the costumes the characters wear and how this too resonates with reversals in gender. Again, what is presented is not “simply” fetish-wear. The already hyperbolic notion of fetish is rendered further hyperbolic and parodied in the context of cross-species-dressing where leather and vinyl garments take the form of a Batsuit and Catsuit, for example.

I will begin my analysis with examples from Tank Girl which will be used to explore notions of the cyborg myth. In this film characters are symbolic extensions of their favorite machines or are crossed-DNA lab experiments. Hybridization and couplings between humans, cross-bred kangaroos and machines abound. Animals, people and machines are
entangled in a complex hybrid relationship which explodes notions of the organic dimensions of body as self. Notions of crossing encompass notions of combining.

My interest in Haraway’s argument begins with her invitation “to contest the meanings of the breached boundary” beyond the position of biological-determinist ideology in scientific culture (1991a, 152). The breached boundary takes the form of cross-species-dressing in *Batman Returns* and *Tank Girl* and unsettles the separation between human and animal in entangled identities and queer sexualities, disturbing normative notions of self and sexuality. I call the characters’ costumes cross-species-dressing in a similar manner to the way I characterized Lois Weaver in chapter three as cross-feminist-dressing. Like Weaver, the characters expand the notion of cross-dressing to include a hybridization of sorts outside the conventional sartorial system. In this case they hybridize human and animal; they cross species. Hybridization and the various types of relationships the characters have with themselves and one another in *Batman Returns* and *Tank Girl* open up conventional ideas of sexual boundaries and human/animal boundaries and move into what Haraway calls “cyborg.” By regarding the cyborg as a myth about identity and boundaries I am embracing “the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self”
In this case, the breakdown of fixed and coherent identity takes place in notions of hybridization and cross-species-dressing.

**Cyborg Tanks and Human Pets**

This section will combine an exploration and development of the cyborg myth with an analysis of the film *Tank Girl*. I will investigate the concept of boundaries in relation to the cyborg and notions of whole and partial identities.

The film *Tank Girl* began as a successful and wildly popular comic book series of the same name, a creation of Worthing comic artists Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin. The move from comic book to the cinema retains elements of the comic genre where live action sequences in the film are interrupted by cartoon 'commentaries' on the scene which either mimic, distort and/or further the action. The frame which contracts or expands to include the various forms the film takes on in this respect destabilizes the notion of an illusionistic or coherent narrative, foregrounding excess and the hyperbolic within a camp context. For example, fight scenes begun in live action might continue in cartoon, which, while more graphic and excessive in terms of the violence committed, maintains a sense of fantasy and the hyperbolic. In fact, there is a dialogue between the cartoon sequences and live action. For example, in the scene where the Water and Power soldiers capture Tank Girl (also called Rebecca in the film), she is struck. The film
immediately cuts to a cartoon bubble which says "This is me unconscious." Tank Girl is consciously able to comment upon her unconsciousness.

The film embraces drag's commitment to layering and incongruity within the sartorial realm. Within the live-action sequences disjunctions occur in terms of sartorial consistency. Tank Girl's "look" is very much a part of her appeal. For instance, she combines army boots with fish net stockings and garters while carrying a machine gun. One shot displays Tank Girl/Rebecca's hair up in braids and in the next she will have hair of various lengths or shaved off, encompassing a rainbow of different colors and she will be clothed differently. There is no narrative motivation for this discontinuity. Rather, discontinuity becomes a part of the world we are watching.

Drag is inflected by technological interventions in this film which links the de-naturalization of the body in drag to the notion of the body becoming cyborg. For example, Tank Girl enters the dressing-room at Liquid Silver, a sex emporium. Water is fetishized as strippers/performers frolic and dance in pools of water. This is significant because Tank Girl is set in a post-apocalyptic world in the year 2033. A comet crashed into the planet eleven years earlier and it has not rained since: "Now twenty people gotta squeeze into the same bathtub . . . so it ain't all bad," says Tank Girl. The earth is a dry and barren wasteland and what ever little water is to be found rests in the hands of the evil Kesslee who runs the corporation Water and Power which, Tank Girl comments, "controls the water and has all the power." Water is a point of
contention and, in camp fashion, a playground in the film. Drag in the film reflects this dichotomy/dialogue.

The uniform of the performers and clientele reflects water as a fetish. The costumes are white/plastic/translucent. The wigs are shimmering and white. The dressing room Rebecca enters has a “glamour port” replete with holographic hostess who describes the procedure to “create your look.” She declares that the dressing room is equipped with “the latest Liquid Silver fashions.” We see racks of plastic, silver and white uniforms. The scene continues with a series of quick, fast-forward sequences where Rebecca is trying on a variety of fetish-gear. She plays dress-up in a Nurse’s uniform — with army boots intact; she dresses up as a dominatrix, all in black with a whip; she tries on several ball gowns. Clothing is strewn about the immaculate room in the process, layer upon layer, which, like drag, mixes up the order of what belongs with what. The cyber-hostess finally says “You have now finished creating your look. If you have followed instructions properly, you should look as so.” The “so” referred to is a clone-like uniform of what we have seen thus far in the club, all plastic, white and neat. In contrast, the camera pans up from Rebecca’s black boots, revealing a mish-mash of boots, stockings, dress, safety pins, negligee, coloured tin foil in her hair. She is smoking a cigarette out of a very elegant cigarette-holder: “Lock up your sons!” she says. Drag in the film resonates with notions of technology and partial identities which are linked, as I will further illustrate, to the cyborg and cyborg world in Tank Girl. Inconsistencies are incorporated such that they
make up the patchwork world to which the characters belong, reflecting their commitment to partiality.

Haraway describes the breakdown of several critical boundaries by the late twentieth century in North American scientific culture, two of which set the foundation for my hybrid/cyborg analysis for drag. The first is the breached boundary between human and animal, “language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. ‘And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation . . .’” (1991a, 151-2). Haraway uses the example of the animal rights movement which does not irrationally deny human uniqueness but recognizes a connection across the breach of nature and culture. The meanings of human animality are opened up beyond such separations and it is within this breached boundary that the cyborg appears in myth.

The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signaling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurable tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange. (1991a, 152)

The cyborg, conventionally conceived of as the hybridization between human and machine, is also connected to a mythical notion of hybridization between human and animal in my analysis. I am not referring to actual animals (even though the meanings here do resonate with current
interspecies scientific experiments), I am referring to myth in the
semiologial tradition of Roland Barthes, that "myth is a system of
communication, that it is a message" (Barthes 1973, 109). The connection
between animals and humans in my analysis plays out in a field of meanings,
as a form of signification, that is myth. For example, animal and human have
come to connote specific meanings, such as "primitive" and "civilized" in
Western culture which have produced "imagin ary" boundaries and
significations. Imaginary boundaries, in turn, produce concrete effects
through various cultural processes/practices. In terms of myth I am taking
the meanings that animal and human have come to signify such as primitive
and civilized not as concrete effects of some knowable and permanent
essence; rather, I am discerning these significations as effects concretely
produced through various cultural practices about imaginary significations.
Concrete effects, produced through various diverse cultural practices,
contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of these imaginary
significations and perpetuate a myth of "immutable qualities." The cyborg
plays upon significations for myth in cross-species-dressing, where stories
about gender and identity, meanings about people, animals and machines
meld together and fragment apart. The cyborg is a hybrid who emphasizes the
significance of storytelling as a strategy of resistance:

[T]hese stories do not rely on the origins myths . . . they explore
the theme of identity on the margins of hegemonic groups and
thereby attempt to deconstruct the authority and legitimacy of
dominant humanist narratives by exposing their partiality. Nor do the storytellers appeal to a seamless identity. As partial and mixed, such identities remain open to establishing connections with others despite many differences. (Sawicki 1996, 169)

In *Tank Girl* there are characters called Rippers who hybridize human and animal traits. Qualities usually associated with "one or the other" combine and play upon notions of myth in *Tank Girl*'s camp context. Our introduction to the Rippers begins with what other characters hypothesize because none of the characters has ever seen a Ripper. According to Tank Girl, they are "a demonic army of bloodthirsty, human-eating, purse-snatching mutant creatures" led by someone called Johnny Prophet and whose main purpose is to bring down the evil corporation Water and Power. She says "Witness exhibit 'A'" and the film cuts to roughly drawn parts of what looks like an animal: a menacing eye, gnashing teeth. For the first part of the film, the live action sequences also reveal "parts" of the Rippers as they flash by the screen during raids on Water and Power. A little girl, Sam, who shares an abandoned house with Rebecca, sculpts what she believes one looks like — a hideous monster-type creature. (In camp tradition, Tank Girl says she didn't trade her "specially autographed Doris Day picture" for a Ripper Bust.) A young boy confronts Sam: "How would you know what one looks like? No one's ever seen a Ripper." The Rippers are constructed as the enemy. It is from parts that they are assembled, like pieces of a puzzle, into a seeming "whole."
The results of their raids and attacks leave human remains strewn about like children’s broken toys; Rippers are vicious. There is a naturalizing/normalizing tendency to this conjecture; after all, beasts will be beasts. As hybrids, however, they are destabilized with respect to those significations. On the one hand, they resonate with seemingly irreconcilable differences in combinations which configure them as marginal/unknowable within the scope of conventional meanings for animal and human. On the other, such a combination creates a new interplay of meanings. The Rippers enter a signification zone of myth which embraces the fantastical. Meanings play out against one another and with one another; “original” significations give birth to other significations. Hybridization is not reconciliation in this analysis because bringing together seemingly discrepant “parts,” as we will see, does not make a finished whole. Paradoxically, hybridization is not reduced to fragmentation either. Partiality is privileged as referents make way for decay and rebirth. I use pregnant metaphors (pun intended) to hint that the cyborg world has specific resonances with breeding which will be discussed further on.

The Rippers’ setting resembles a clubhouse which is located underneath the desert, where the hypothesized monsters relish crumpets and tea, an epitome of “high society.” The vicious is combined with the elegant. Likewise, cross-species-dressing and the creatures’ personalities hybridize a range of types. Booga wears a T-shirt and ironically carries a stuffed toy
animal — he is the “innocent” one. There is the playboy type, Donner, who wears a T-shirt with the Playboy bunny icon on the front and who consistently “comes on” to Rebecca and Jet Girl. There is the poet and philosopher, Deete, who wears glasses and a jacket, an educated leader type who leads the voting process they engage in frequently: democracy reigns for this group. And there is the rebel type, the one who is committed to radical action, and who is dressed like a “home-boy,” T-Saint (significantly played by rapper Ice-T). In a dialogue which is consistent with the camp tone of the film, the Rippers must decide what to do with Tank Girl and Jet Girl: T-Saint says, “I say we kill them.” Donner says, “I say we hump ‘em.” Booga, the innocent, says, “I say we get crumpets and tea.” “Tasty,” says Deete. “All in favour of crumpets and tea say ‘Aye’.” All but rebel T-Saint say “Aye.” The relationships between the characters and their personalities become established. Their small tight-knit community appears more “civilized” than the human civilization above ground. Ideas of the primitive, associated with animals and civilized, associated with humans are rendered hyperbolic within a camp context. The residue of their actions, the parts that construed them as monsters, refer to mythical significations for beasts or animals. The referents for animality are played upon. The whole, constructed from parts, consists of further fragmentations which create new parts. Trinh T. Minh-ha talks about a “myth of mythology” (1989, 60) where it is not oneself or the other who is encountered in anthropological discourses, which are regarded as conventionally colonizing, where “the skin of native life” (56) is recorded
to trace the "anatomy of a culture" (57). Rather, what is experienced is the imposition of oneself on the other. (60) The Rippers are positioned as a form of native other in the film, who, resonating with an anti-colonialist discourse which runs throughout the film, resist a type of anthropological categorization. Their traces cannot be used to develop a coherent story as to their "nature."

For example, boundary categories for the cyborg are broken down from a binary or exclusive position of either human-animal or human-machine in a manner which combines those positions. That is, the notion of the hybrid expands to include further crossings and combinings. When she meets them, Rebecca calls the Rippers "manimals." We find out from Booga that the government wanted to create the perfect soldier and so " messed with DNA" and created them. They are, in relation to this information, weapons, extending their hybridized status to include a new notion of 'biological warfare' creating them as cyborg. As extensions of the war-machine, the enhanced soldier is made so by combining organic elements. The cyborg is not conventional in the sense that the machine intervenes on the organic body to make it cyborg, rather the cyborg is constructed out of organic parts. It is possible here to read the discursive, symbolic body and the material body as mutually determining but not bound to stable referents. The cyborg, in this context, is about reorganized biology and the connections that the new body has to significations of the machine in terms of 'weapons.'
The personality types the Rippers embody also play upon the significations for identities as “natural.” It is conventionally unlikely that cyborg warriors should have such distinct, if seemingly stereotyped, personalities. It is incongruous that they should enjoy tea-time. It is likewise comical to see a human type of character (innocent, playboy, philosopher, rebel) played by an inter-species creature. These seeming contradictions play upon spectatorial expectations and foreground the arbitrary nature of the types the creatures embody. References to the hybrid underneath the signifying garments become increasingly destabilized. The boundary between human and animal, made bold by the character types in relation to their hybridized status, is made further still complex by the foregrounded unlikely boundary between animal and animal, where the references are “stuffed animals” or “Playboy bunnies” which signify outside themselves in terms of connotations of innocence or experience. Apparent boundaries play out within, so that “animal” itself is a contested term or boundary. It could be said then, that with reference to signification, “animal” crosses with itself and combines with itself, and is cyborg by itself. The layering of references for identity opens up into a proliferation of identities within identities, where no one signification or referent is stable enough to signify categorically.

In addition to interspecies characters in the film there are characters who function as symbolic extensions of their machines. For example, Tank Girl is an extension of her army tank and Jet Girl referred to simply as “Jet” in
the film, is an extension of her military jet. Their very names hybridize human and machine. This leads to Haraway’s other boundary breakdown or “leaky distinction [which] is between animal-human (organism) and machine” (1991a, 152).

Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. (152)

As I have shown with respect to the breaching of the animal/animal boundary, boundaries such as animal/person or organism/machine can be breached further. Drag is interesting in this film because it includes not only cross-species-dressing but cross-machine-dressing. The machines, which become a symbolic extension of their cohorts, get dressed up, painted and accessorized. Originally owned by Water and Power, they are stolen by Tank Girl and Jet and “personalized.” They are, in fact, also “animalized” which I will discuss further on. The tank and jet initially “wear” the uniform of Water and Power, complete with logo and official colours. To hide the fact that they have stolen the machines, Tank Girl and Jet transform them. Tank Girl’s tank, in camp fashion, comes replete with martini bar, barbecue, reclining chair, parasol, etc. The jet is painted red and tattooed. The tank and jet not only take on new guises but they are enhanced with added remote control features.
It is possible to regard the cyborg in the technological realm as crossing with itself: machines in drag. Drag, in the form of cross-tank/jet-dressing, includes the organic intervention on technology where the conventional analytical emphasis has been on “technology on the body” not the techno-body (Tank Girl and Jet Girl as cyborg) on technology. Where it is conventional to think of technology acting on the organic body creating it as cyborg (liposuction, contact lenses, hearing aids, pace makers), it is also possible in this film to see how technology acts upon technology. That is, the machines become “cyborg” as they are added onto, enhanced. The machines as symbolic extensions of Tank Girl and Jet Girl extend and enhance their personalities and capabilities and the machines get further technological extensions to enhance their (machines’) performance and personality. One could say that the conventional process of the human body becoming enhanced through cyborg/technological intervention expands and goes both ways here. Tank Girl and Jet Girl are improved by virtue of their machines; the machines are improved by cyborgs.

Boundaries continue to break down and proliferate. Not only does the cyborg-organism act upon technology, but technology intersects with meanings about animality. For example, in one scene Tank Girl calls for her tank much the same way a pet caregiver would call for its animal. The tank appears to talk back to Tank Girl with beeps and comes to her when she whistles for it, responding likewise to her voice commands. The film creates a reference for the pet-like quality of the relationship between Rebecca and the
tank at the beginning of the film when we see Rebecca riding a horned beast, with goggles and snout-mask. Rebecca herself is wearing goggles and a mask, connecting the beast and Rebecca through accessories or cyborg extensions. The idea that the tank resembles a pet is in keeping with my cyborg configuration which includes an entanglement of animal, person and machine. It also opens up the idea that the cyborg hybrid can be machine/machine. The machine crosses with itself in a complex intermingling of add-ons, crossing over from its seemingly "original" purpose to expand into other possibilities. Not only is the body a "boundary concept" in this configuration, but the machine is as well. Crossings which take place within seemingly whole, self-contained boundaries destabilize these boundaries.

**Insides Twisted Outside Twisted Inside... or Just Twisted**

In a more literal connection between human and machine, there is an evil character, Kesslee, who becomes part human and part hologram. There are also vampiristic devices which turn human blood into water to be drunk and incorporated back into the body once again, blurring the markers which distinguish inside and outside for the body.

My configuration of the cyborg myth refashions the "natural" body into a boundary concept. That is, notions of boundaries themselves are conceived of as convention, where what is split is split again in possibilities for quantum proliferations which subvert "organic wholes... what counts as
nature — a source of insight and promise of innocence — is undermined, probably fatally” (Haraway, 152-3). Notions of inside and outside as defining parameters of self become self-reflexive in Tank Girl in relation to the cyborg and the body. Ideas of personhood are contested; the identifiable cues for the outside to signal some identifiable inside (for example, outside/dress equals inside/woman) are unsettled with respect to identities and the organic body. In one scene there is the expectation that Tank Girl will strip for the Rippers. The camera moves from a cartoon picture on the wall of a naked woman, to a blow-up sex doll, to Rebecca on the couch removing a corset . . . painted with a picture of a naked woman’s torso. She wears a T-shirt beneath the corset and is in fact not naked, nor is she stripping in the conventional sense. The painted corset disturbs our expectations, the body is removable and unnatural. Melding cyborg notions of “extensions” with drag, the body is made cyborg in this scene. Where what is expected is the naked body beneath the clothes, the naked body (painted on the corset) is removed to reveal clothing. Expectations get deferred where the reference is the representation of the woman’s body as opposed to the notion of the real body. The foregrounded reference (painting on the wall, blow up doll, body corset) is the “idea” of the female body.

The diegetic apparatus which turns blood into water disturbs the idea of containment with respect to the organic and the parameters of the body. The vampiristic device which turns human blood into water to be drunk and incorporated back into the body once again blurs the markers which
distinguish inside and outside for the body. Kesslee uses this apparatus as a weapon in one of the early scenes in the film. Sticking the hand-held apparatus into his victim’s body, the apparatus sucks out his blood like a cyborg vampire, immediately turning the blood into water, which in turn is ingested by Kesslee. Inside the body to outside the body to inside the body once again; the parameters for what constitutes the organic self are made dubious and exchangeable. It is also significant that Kesslee does not act the part of the vampire in the traditional sense. That is, he does not “personally” take the blood of his victim into his own body but has a technological go-between which alters the organic fluid substance. The technological intervention becomes an extension of Kesslee’s evil power enhancing him in such a way as to make him cyborg.

Another interesting self-reflexive turn of the inside/outside paradigm continues with Kesslee. On his death bed after being torn apart by the Rippers, Kesslee undergoes surgery. He is missing an arm and his face is “gutted.” A specialist in “cybergenic reconstructive surgery” is brought in and we see him holding a mechanical arm with spikes. The specialist takes huge shears and applies them to Kesslee’s neck. We hear a crunch and the sound of Kesslee’s heart on the monitor goes flat. Apparently his head has been removed. What slowly comes to be revealed in the film is that his head has been replaced by a hologram which looks exactly like his organic “original.” If the personality is said to reside in the brain, or the brain functions as “self” where does Kesslee’s identity reside when his head is not organic, his own? The organic
as self is put into question. Identity, as Kesslee’s case exemplifies, does not reside in the body. He is resurrected from flat-line/dead person to enhanced human-machine hybrid retaining all “identifiable” traits with a radically altered, technologically intervened body (camped up by his attempts to drink water, which make him spark and fizzle). Interestingly, and in camp fashion, his final demise refers back to the legendary scene in The Wizard of Oz where the Wicked Witch of the West is killed by water. Likewise, water – the force of life and source of Kesslee’s power – is used to short circuit and melt Kesslee. The body, like identity, is rendered less than coherently knowable. Where does gender or identity reside when the body is comprised of technological extensions and interventions or, in Kesslee’s case, replacements?

The same myth varies widely from one teller to another and ‘yet the natives do not seem to worry about this state of affairs.’ Why would they indeed? Who sets off searching for ‘real origins’? Who suffers from the need for classification and identification? Who strives for identity, a certain identity...? Since there is ‘no hidden unity to be grasped,’ no secret meaning to discover behind the package, to look for it is to throw the package away.

(Trinh 1989, 62)

Notions of partiality and continuity in relation to identity are hyperbolized even further as these characters describe themselves as
"reincarnated." Deete, the poet/philosopher is the reincarnation of Jack Kerouac and recites poetry. T-Saint, the rebel, who is consistently suspicious of Tank Girl and Jet, was a "cop" in his previous life. The playboy, Donner, says "I used to be Ted Smith — an assistant buyer of auto-parts in Cincinnati, Ohio." Booga says, "I used to be a dog, but because I was good they moved me up to human being status ... sort of." Hence, even their "origins" as DNA hybrid experiments are torn asunder by the implication that one exists not in relation to conception/creation but in relation to some unknowable, metaphysical connection across space and time (cyborg breeding will be further investigated in *Batman Returns*). While "connected" across time there is a resistance to permanence and identity. These characters embody a notion of myth which refuses a core identity, where myth plays upon myth or being upon being:

He who represents his own discourse on myths as myth is acutely aware of the illusion of all reference to a subject as absolute center. ... Anonymous myths give birth to other anonymous myths, multiplying and ramifying themselves without fear of one being absorbed by the other, and beyond any myth teller's control. Like leaves of grass, they grow and die following the rhythm of impermanent-permanent nature. (Trinh 1989, 61)

Sexuality in *Tank Girl* is wrenched from procreation and queered from normative directions. That is, birth or breeding does not originate from
sexual practices in the case of the Rippers, nor do sexual relations take place for procreative reasons. The couplings, which include human-machine in this film, serve as an appropriate introduction to what will become further entanglements in *Batman Returns*.

The first time Tank Girl meets her tank, she is a prisoner of Water and Power. She escapes to where the tanks are kept and as she sneaks around a bend, her eyes light up and she goes weak at what we see her looking at. The film cuts to a shot of a long, phallic cannon attached to the front of the tank; the rest of the tank is obscured. A cartoon bubble comes up with the phrase “My God! The sheer size of it . . . .” She straddles the canon and we hear in voice over “I think I’m in love!” (Her position on the cannon also resonates with her appropriation of the phallus which could be regarded as a symbolic cyborg attachment; enhancing Tank Girl with qualities usually associated with the phallus such as strength and power.) Tank Girl and her tank play upon the notion of a couple. For example, about to embark on a dangerous mission with the Rippers to Water and Power, she claims she is not going anywhere without her tank . . . the old ball and chain, so to speak. Because, as I have discussed, the tank is animalized, there is also a sense of “bestiality” that resonates with Rebecca and the tank's relationship, echoing Haraway’s notion that “cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurable tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange” (1991a, 152). The relationship that forms between Tank Girl and the Ripper Booga foregrounds “bestiality” in a more literal sense, although it too resonates with the
technological impact of Booga and Tank Girl's cyborg status. Their relationship develops with a sweet intimacy, combining the sexual with an emotional component — cyborg relations do not exclude the emotional component regarded as absent with respect to machines. Their sartorial relationship in camp contexts refers to their technological aspects as well. In one scene they are lying on Booga's bed and Tank Girl is wearing a bra with plastic attachments shaped like toy-missiles. Booga is wearing a T-shirt with a target on it. In another example which highlights the playful attitude around sexuality in the film, Donner, the playboy, makes a pass at Jet and says "It's all right, I have condoms," satirically emphasizing a normative issue about sexual relations (contraception and safe-sex) and the question of "appropriate" inter-species-relations. The boundaries that are breached in this film with respect to sexuality, within the context of entangled identities, include breaching boundaries with respect to cyborg sexuality. Animal-human or human-machine boundaries proliferate to include combinations and permutations of those.

Leather, Feathers and Fur: Cross-Species-Dressing in Batman Returns

In chapter two I explored how the Hollywood film form contains, restrains and recuperates the problems of cross-dressing. Haraway talks about "machines given ghostly souls to make them speak" (1991a, 178). Vida in To Wong Foo exemplified this as a literal manifestation, an angel created by a Hollywood film to speak its ideology. In Batman Returns, Hollywood film is
still the machine — a cinematic apparatus whose characters represent offspring resisting their "origins" or the form by which they are contained, who are nevertheless in *kinship* with the form. Kinship exists because of contradictions, that is, the film expands and doubles because of the contradictions taking place there. Like *Tank Girl*, *Batman Returns* can be explored beyond conventional notions of cross-dressing as drag. Because the structuring device is not normative sexuality or normative gender the form expands or doubles with (in kinship) the active contradictions that are taking place there. Both films, as leaky wholes, contain active aspects of domination and possibility — becoming cyborg, where drag as cross-species-dressing explodes the conventions of traditional cross-dressing.

In *Batman Returns* the main characters, Batman, Catwoman and Penguin are human-animal hybrids. They are brought into the cyborg myth by the film’s structuring device of consensual S/M which unsettles normative notions of sexuality and which offers resistance to the unitary Western subject making possible multiple and shifting identities. S/M, camp and hybridization function integrally with costume which is the means to transformation from human to animal. I will show that the animal and human guises, like identity, are unstable and are subject to injury and rupture. I use the term S/M in its broad sense to refer to the "general subculture of organized fetishism," including:

B and D (bondage and discipline), CP (corporeal punishment).

TV (transvestitism)...body piercing, foot fetishism and so on.
These fetishes should be seen as overlapping, sometimes distinct sub-genres in a general sub-culture of collective fetish ritual...within these genres there may be distinct forms: there are different forms of TV, for example, and different forms of B and D. Indeed, understanding and negotiating these distinctions serves as a crucial source of the pleasure, intimacy, identity and communality that can be engendered by consensual S/M. (McClintock, 228)

The distance from the straight sexual world view often entangled with camp, conventionally seen to be achieved almost exclusively in a gay male subculture (chapter three), can be located in the queer sexual arena of S/M. Camp's fascination with drag, cross-dressing, fusing and diffusing (body) parts that do or do not usually "belong" is taken to the extreme in *Batman Returns* in tails, claws and ears which strain to empower in mutation and (re)creation. I will explore certain commonalties which exist between S/M and camp, namely, their shared fascination with the hyperbolic, excess, costumes and the switching of conventional roles. Camp and S/M are melded together with great theatricality in *Batman Returns*. The film uses theatrical paraphernalia associated with both camp and S/M in the form of leather, vinyl, spiked boots, feathers, fur, whips, masks, costumes and S/M scenarios. Like camp, consensual S/M's theatricality foregrounds notions of "being as playing role" and offers a further model for critiques of sex and gender identity. It expands camp's articulation within and outside a gay male subculture, feminist or
lesbian performance practice to include various other sexual practices which are likewise marginalized.

My analysis of S/M in Batman Returns is inflected by certain strains in Foucauldian distinctions between domination and power. For Foucault "domination" refers to a situation where resistance is impossible. The subject is not able to overturn or reverse the dominant relation whereas relations of "power" are "flexible, mutable, fluid, and even reversible" (Sawicki 1996, 170): "[A] system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it" (Foucault 1988, 294). Within parodic scenarios of consensual S/M, relations of power are fluid and play upon fixed notions of domination. Literal constraints (handcuffs, leather garments) are modified in cyborg fashion, exchanged and thrown away. Reversals of power are played out in parodic scenarios of domination and submission, where social roles are "played backwards." Placed within the theatrical context of camp and S/M, notions of nature and identity in Batman Returns explode, undoing conventional structures of desire.

The relationships the characters of Batman, Catwoman and the Penguin hold with one another and with the spectator can be described as partaking in the social sub-culture of consensual fetishism. Consensual fetishism is distinct from the unbridled sadism usually used in defining and demonizing S/M, where the master has power and absolute control over the slave. In consensual S/M slave and master share power; to see the master as
having power and the slave as not having power is to read it as simply
imitating cultural prescriptions for power and submission. Consensual S/M
plays upon the meanings of sexual difference in apparent reversals; that is, it
refutes the qualities associated with that division as stable. “Contrary to
popular stigma, S/M theatricality flouts the edict that manhood is
synonymous with mastery, and submission a female fate” (McCintock, 207).
*Batman Returns*’ S/M is a theatre of transformation which, with its attendant
props and costuming, makes way for species mutation and ironic self-
reflection.

As animal-human hybrids involved in S/M practices, the characters in
*Batman Returns* are cyborg. The cyborg world includes a doubling of vision,
explored in terms of drag and camp in the last two chapters which, in this
film, includes holding up the contrasting notions of power/domination and
freedom/possibilities. In the cyborg world it is necessary to see from both —
positions of kinship and positions of domination at once — because “each
reveals both dominations and possibilities, unimaginable from the other
vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or
many-headed monsters” (Haraway 1991a, 154). S/M practice is cyborg in
*Batman Returns* because it includes the notion of breached boundaries
regarding normative sexuality and gendered positions of power and
submission, manifesting sexual couplings which do resonate with
unconventional practices which, as seen in *Tank Girl*, include conceptual
“bestiality” for the hybridized characters
The costumes in the film take on the qualities associated with S/M paraphernalia in excessive forms of leather, vinyl, spiked boots, feathers, fur, whips and masks. Batman appears to be wearing some type of reinforced leather and/or rubber garment and cape. He wears black gloves, and a hooded mask resembling an executioner's mask with bat ears morphing through. Batman's closet in the Batcave (S/M read: dungeon) looks like a vault, inside which hang rows of Batsuits with attendant paraphernalia and props. A description by a visitor of an S/M dungeon recalls "the sheer volume of props and costumes. It was like a theatre warehouse or a film set. Hanging on pegs on all the walls and corridors were hundreds of outfits . . . anything you can imagine having a fetish about" (McClintock, 225). The spectator of Batman Returns is given a brief look inside Batman's vault/closet resembling the position of "a client helplessly fascinated by fetish images of authority — handcuffs, badges, uniforms — and most domina have rackfuls of costumes: 'Uniformists' desire to wear or be serviced by someone wearing a uniform" (McClintock, 225). Like a "domina" (a term usually attributed to the female dominant partner), Batman has rackfuls of Batsuits. Batman both wears the uniform and "services" the spectator's fetishistic desire. Consensual fetishism opens up the relationship of audience as fetishistic consumer. When David Bordwell said that "every film trains its spectator," (1985, 45) within the context of S/M fetishism, he could not have been more precise.

The costumes and associated paraphernalia of Batman and Catwoman engender extraordinary physical power in the film. The idea of the cyborg
illicits notions of improvement or enhancement. Combinations are formed and melded together which increase performance, such as the Rippers in *Tank Girl* and science fiction films which hybridize human and machine to create the ultimate soldier-as-weapon (the Schwarzenegger *Terminator* [James Cameron, 1986 & 1991] films, Van Damme’s *Universal Soldier* [Roland Emerich, 1992], the Borg in the *Star Trek* [David Carson, 1995] film and television series etc.). Hence, the idea of the hyperbolic, embodied by the cyborg, becomes linked to the film through S/M fetish gear. The Master is able to dominate his/her slave with the use of props such as paddles, feathers, chains and whips. Batman comes equipped with various aids or theatrical props to help him “master” various super-normal feats and save himself in dangerous circumstances. These props become technological extensions and enhancements of his animal-human hybridization. The notion of improvement in this film, however, is distinguished from ideas of control and power because these aspects are unstable and shifting in the context of consensual S/M. For example, Batman carries a lethal boomerang, and can shoot cable into surfaces to swing out and save himself in apparent no-way-out scenes. It is characteristic of consensual S/M to have a scripted “save word” which would indicate to the Master to increase or decrease the intensity of the “scene” or to stop all together. “Many S/M fetishists claim that it is thus the ‘bottom’ who is in control” (McClintock, 226). Power, in the realm of the hyperbolic, is shifting as Batman oscillates between the
boundaries of Master and Slave in his costume with its attendant props, where he can dominate and/or escape if dominated.

Reversals of Power and Identities

In camp's fashion, consensual S/M in *Batman Returns* parodically emphasizes gendered signs of power through the hyperbolization of conventional social roles. The transformation of the ordinary into something more spectacular functions to emphasize play rather than existence. It is not so much "the actuality of power or submission that holds the S/Mer in its thrall but the signs of power: images, words, costumes, uniforms, scripts" (McClintock, 225). These signs of power are in full evidence in the costumes/uniforms and props of the cross-species characters. Likewise, there are numerous examples of drag in relation to the re-vision of power structured relationships in consensual S/M to be found in *Batman Returns*. For example, Catwoman wears vinyl while Batman is armoured with a bulletproof torso vest: "The domina’s breasts are bare; the slave is armoured" (McClintock, 207). Catwoman plays the role of domina in her more "fragile" (traditionally read as feminine) costume to Batman’s armoured (traditionally read as masculine) slave role. Costumes play upon significations for consensual S/M in drag fashion. The meanings associated with traditionally gendered clothing are layered, doubled and reversed in S/M’s context.

Catwoman’s costume resonates with camp excess, S/M costumes and fetishistic desire. Through cross-species-dressing her costume signals a
tension between the hybridized and unstable boundaries of original self, animal other and marginalized sexuality. Catwoman carries a whip and wears a mask attached to the suit. Sharp, piercing claws are attached to her vinyl covered fingers. On her feet, high-heeled boots extend up her leg as part of the suit signalling a foot fetishist’s fantasy or cyborg enhancement. Her lips are painted a blood red, with a gloss to match the vinyl on her body. "Endearingly klutzy initially as Selina, she looks amazing in her skin-tight, S/M-like leather skin, [and] wins the viewer over to her new incarnation with her intimidating display of whip mastery" (McCarthy, 56). While Catwoman wears vinyl, her close association with cats, including her own black one, serves to mirror her in the film, and connects her with fur. The catsuit enables the manifestation of extraordinary strength and gymnastic feats including tumbling, jumping from great heights, springing and sprinting. Catwoman is also given nine lives. She can play with her life with the confidence she is in no real danger – consensual S/M is the embodiment of that fantasy. S/M is theatre, not reality: life is not threatened.

Popular descriptions about the characters in the film include notions of transformation and fragmented personal identity: "Michelle Pfeiffer's schizophrenic Catwoman, a ditzy loser reincarnated as a PVC pervert" (Newman 1992, 49). Selina's shattered sense of self and "perversion" subvert through the fragmentation of stable identity and sexuality. In S/M, characters partake in the "economy of S/M [as] the economy of conversion: slave to master, adult to baby, pain to pleasure, [human to animal,] and back again"
As was elaborated upon in Tank Girl, hybridization in Batman Returns "includes" and "connects" across seemingly irreconcilable opposites or boundaries; hybridization shatters, rejects and reabsorbs.

Catwoman's shiny, black vinyl Catsuit looks like a second skin she has been sewn into. Indeed, the obvious, botched suit stitching resembles surgical stitching gone amiss and the idea of piercing skin: "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original: it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly; and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (emphasis added, Haraway 1991b, 22). Sewing herself a "self," Catwoman embodies a notion of the bricoleur, one who works with the tools at hand and engineer, working with the tools she creates anew. Lévi-Strauss describes the bricoleur in opposition to the engineer (or scientist) and says that the engineer questions "the universe, while the bricoleur addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours . . ." (1966, 19). Not only does this description resonate with how Catwoman sews herself into the vinyl which becomes her second skin from left-over materials found in her home as Selina Kyle; as "engineer" of her new identity, she questions universal notions of identity. There is a constant "oscillation between these two distinct, absorption-resistant presences."8 In Writing and Difference (1978) Jacques Derrida says:

A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it 'out of
nothing,' 'out of whole cloth,' would appear to be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of bricolage is therefore a theological idea . . . the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur. As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down. (285)

Shifting subjectivity and experience as Selina Kyle and as Catwoman affords her multiple experiences in different worlds; that is, one world does not mutually exclude the other. The boundaries between an original self and an animal other are fused, fragmented and linked through sexuality. For instance, Catwoman/Selina’s sexuality also leaks into the various worlds and scenes she experiences. She retains a sexuality as Selina that pervades her character in the cat suit. This is significant in that, as Selina, she retains no other hyperbolic traits such as the gymnastics she is able to perform in the catsuit.

The Catsuit is her bridge between worlds, and comprises a tension which is palpable as the film progresses and her stitches fall apart and can no
longer hide the human skin underneath, leaving her vulnerable to being identified as Selina Kyle. The idea of fixed identification, located in a whole self as Selina or Catwoman, is disrupted because Selina’s human flesh/skin/boundary is subject to injury through her costume’s skin/boundary. The wound of the flesh mimics and exceeds the tear of vinyl. Her costume is fragile and subject to injury in as much as her skin and identity are. Resonating with notions of cross-dressing and the “real” body beneath the clothes, cat skin and human skin are no longer the defining parameters of self. The tension between the boundaries for Catwoman and Selina Kyle’s identity, where there is play between signification and expectation, contextualized by consensual S/M, is self-referential and shifts off stable models of categorization.

The costumes, linked to consensual S/M, destabilize normative notions of sexuality in terms of passivity/female, domination/male, complicating the idea of sexual difference. This becomes further complex by the search for the man behind the bat and woman behind the cat. Ruptured vinyl (cat skin) and ruptured human skin occur in a fight with Batman who likewise has his Bat costume and human skin torn. Catwoman seductively says to him, “Who is the man behind the bat? Maybe you could help me find the woman behind the cat.” Feeling his armour suit she says “No, that’s not you,” discovering a vulnerable spot in the armour she claws and pierces his suit and flesh into which she loses a claw. He punches her and she falls over the building into a sand truck, her vinyl and flesh torn. Her camp response is,
“Saved by kitty litter.” The quest for the man behind the bat and woman behind the cat is fraught with injury and ruptured identity. Back at the Bat Cave, Batman pulls out the claw from his side and calls Alfred, the butler, to bring him antiseptic ointment. In keeping with the S/M structure of the relationship between Catwoman and Batman, Alfred asks him if he is in pain. Bleeding, and looking at the claw he says, “No, not really,” and then says “Meow!” Consensual S/M is parodically connected to notions of identity in the film, as the sexual dynamic between Batman and Catwoman made apparent by this sequence suggests. The next time Batman and Catwoman meet, it is as Bruce and Selina. They begin a sexual encounter on a couch in Bruce Wayne's estate which necessitates constant manoeuvring in order to avoid the other's touch of the injured parts of their bodies. They are obviously in pain from their fight as Batman and Catwoman while simultaneously enjoying their encounter as Selina and Bruce. The injuries incurred by the fight scene, in disguise, bleed over into the lives of their supposedly “natural” selves unsettling the categories of disguise, nature and self-identity. The examples of injury and sexual attraction, in and out of costume, suggest that these are not split subjects in a binary sense, in that one life (Catwoman, Batman) would mutually exclude the other (Selina Kyle, Bruce Wayne). Splitting includes the notion of combining. Fragmentation is not about separate or disassociated parts, but how these parts may combine and include to create new meanings.
The switching of dominant/submissive (top/bottom) roles between Batman and Catwoman continues and is effected on several levels destabilizing crossings associated with fixed referents. Examples can be found in the fight for power and control in their various scenes. In one fight scene Catwoman uses the traditional helpless appeal to being female, "How could you? I'm a woman!" To which Batman lets his guard down long enough for Catwoman to give him a swift kick in the face. Being a woman has little to do with being submissive. Traditional expectations regarding femininity, such as Catwoman's line in the previous example, are manipulated in a visible arena (S/M), playing social power backwards. My explorations of the femme-feminist in chapter three expand into new territories here to include notions for a camp S/M feminist avenger. For instance, a review in Rolling Stone says, "Meow, indeed. Though her lusty kicking of Batman's face may arouse kinky thoughts, Catwoman is no bimbo in black leather. Pfeiffer gives this feminist avenger a tough core of intelligence and wit" (Travers 1992, 110).

Notions of recognition and disguise are further contorted in Batman Returns. The adoption of the Bat or Cat costume may be described as the attempt to disguise oneself (masking) and as an excess of self (cyborg-like extensions). The mask as a part of the costume is referred to in terms of something to hide in the film. For example, when Penguin and Batman meet for the first time Batman asks Penguin what he wants. Penguin responds, "The direct approach — I admire that in a man with a mask." Marked by their resistance to self-identity by playing upon notions of truth and disguise, the
characters actualize a theoretical notion of liminal subjects. They embody the notion of boundary creatures and inappropriate/other (Trinh) "who cannot adopt the mask of either 'self' or 'other' offered by previously dominant Western narratives of identity and politics" (Haraway 1991b, 23).

For example, the relationship between truth and disguise in relation to notions of self and other is played out most prominently in the following scene. Bruce and Selina arrive independently at a masquerade ball and are the only ones not wearing masks or conventional costumes. Selina says to Bruce, "There's a big comfy California King in bedding — what do you say . . . We could take off our costumes." Bruce, responding to Selina's ironic observation that they were not costumed to begin with, says, "I guess I'm tired of wearing masks." "Me too," Selina replies. They are nonetheless disguised from each other. Masking, which takes human form (which is not "self") for Selina and Bruce during the masquerade ball, uses human identity to hide animal identity. There is nothing to find beneath human skin, which like costume disturbs notions of the parameters for self. Costumes, masks, apparel that suggest the hidden truth about the identity of the wearer evaporate as effective markers. The concealed "true" self cannot be revealed with proper attire or outside costume. By resisting the conventional narrative of disguise, they do not adopt the mask of "self" or "other." Issues of hidden identity and appearance are ironically engaged and played with self-referentially. They play upon notions of self and other.
The build up to the moment of recognition of each other’s animal identity is layered with references to self-identity. Selina pulls out a gun saying she came for her ex-boss, Max Shreck. Bruce asks her “Who do you think you are?” “I really don’t know,” she says. Finally, in human guise, their superhero animal guises are revealed to each other. The revelation takes place not by the removal of masks or costumes but through a reference to a sexual repartee that had occurred between them during a fight as Batman and Catwoman under a mistletoe. At the masquerade ball it is Selina who begins the phrase previously said by Batman (an instant reversal) and the moment Bruce begins to respond — they “know.” Selina’s response to the recognition is “Does this mean we’ll have to fight?” Indeed, what ground do they stand on now that they are supposedly revealed to one another? The meanings and interpretations of disguise shift along with the uncertainty of personal identity for the characters and their actions.

The association in *Batman Returns* of the human characters with their animal guises can be related to the historical conceiving of S/M with relation to nature and the primitive. Commenting upon the demonization of S/M by sexologists like Krafft-Ebing, McClintock notes how S/M was regarded as the “psychopathology of the atavistic individual, as a blood-flaw and stigma of the flesh. S/M, like other fetishisms, was figured as a regression in time to the ‘prehistory’ of racial ‘degeneration’, existing ominously in the heart of the imperial metropolis” (208-210). An interesting connection can be made
between the primitivization of S/M and the cross-species characters. In *Batman Returns* the “imperial metropolis” is Gotham City in which “individuals adopt totemic animals and react with unrelieved psychopathic violence” (Newman, 1992, 49). Historically, natural male aggression was conceived of as a “fait accompli of nature” and genuine sadism existed in “civilized man” only in a ‘weak and rather rudimentary degree.’ While Sadism is a natural trait of ‘primitive’ peoples, atavistic traces of sadism in ‘civilized man’ stem, not from environment or social accident, but from a primordial past: ‘Sadism must . . . be counted among the primitive anomalies of the sexual life. It is a disturbance (a deviation) in the evolution of the psychosexual processes sprouting from the soil of psychical degeneration.’

The “primitive” existence of the Bat, Cat and Penguin in the ominous metropolis of Gotham City are comic book examples of Krafft-Ebbing’s theorization: a Darwinian regression into a primordial site, unleashing “uncivilized” sexual desire and response. Within a camp context, notions of the primitive attached to S/M are played upon and rendered hyperbolic in cross-species-dressing.

Notions of the primitive are further unhinged by playing upon notions of origins in relation to power. Power in *Batman Returns* is found in the multiple and shifting subject located in the margins of sexuality and cross-species-dressing. As in *Tank Girl* hybridization occurs outside the contractual
(marriage) parameters (organic coupling) of Western culture. Catwoman is conceived out of a violent plunge to earth after which she is bitten by cats until she bleeds: a transfusion of the species occurs metaphysically. "People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence" (Haraway 1991a, 153). Catwoman finally gives birth to herself, sewing together the vinyl which becomes her skin. Significantly, the eroticization of the body—ears which strain under masks, feet in spiked boots, nails as claws—expands beyond genitals to include non-procreational sites. The Bat, Cat and Penguin rupture the confines of a (primordial) past and refuse a Western Oedipal narrative: they escape and exceed familial models within a context of animal hybridization and S/M. "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration in the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos" (Haraway 1991a, 151).

Catwoman's nine lives facilitate a continual metaphysical re-birth or re-incarnation. In cyborg fashion she self-regenerates outside the human parameters of the meanings of life and death. Re-birth is aligned with the idea of breeding, associated with animals and connected to the notion of cyborg. Haraway invokes the notion of a "bastard race" as a metaphor for the transgression of boundaries that delineate race, gender, sexuality, the human body— that is, individual and social identity. Transgressions of the self in
terms of "procreation" for the characters find them on the margins of meaning for that term.

Indeed, Penguin is born "flawed" to human parents who throw him away into a dark Nile on a cold winter night. His subsequent parentage is by penguins whom he resembles closely and whom he calls his children, extending the theme of kinship between animal and human. Penguin's costume appears to come closer to his skin than even Catwoman's "second" skin. We see Penguin's guise as his apparent "natural" bodily state throughout the film. His skin is a whitish grey, his eyes are bloodshot, he appears cold and clammy like a fish, he is short, fat and waddles like the penguins who raised him. In fetish custom Penguin is associated with the feathers of the birds who surround him. Penguin says to Batman, "You're just jealous because I'm a genuine freak and you have to wear a mask." To which Batman replies, "You may be right." As I considered earlier the mask does not alter notions of identity. Identity is uncertain and unstable with or without a mask. Penguin's costume is primarily as flesh which could mistakenly appear more stable, defining or real than that of Catwoman and Batman because it is a product of his birth by human parents, that is, he appears to have secure origins not located in the margins or in the bastard race that created him to look as he does. His "original" birth does not constitute him as a finished whole, however. He continues to self-breed in the film. Born a monster and soon-after discarded by his parents, Oswald was raised by Penguins since he was a baby. He lives in an icy underground
world and eats live fish. As an outcast, living on the margins, his survival depends upon the kindness of “strangers” in the very strange sense of the term. Haraway says “the bastard race teaches us about the power of the margins” (1991a, 176).”¹³ His society is comprised of side-show circus performers, those who live on the margins, and who are usually defined by their inappropriate and “unnatural” combinings (hybridizations), for example, the bearded lady or Siamese twins.

The notion of origins becomes foregrounded within the plot for Penguin. When Penguin comes to the surface of the city, the “real” world, already distorted by the dark eerieness of Gotham City, it is under the pretence of searching for his origins, his birth parents. Penguin’s actual motives are revenge. Ideas of legitimacy as linked to origins play out in a contentious arena of truth or disguise. Disguise for Penguin takes the form of legitimate politics; he runs for mayor. The business suit Penguin wears does nothing to change his “natural” physique or strengthen his tyrannical power as the Batsuit and Catsuit do. The business suit is in keeping with the penguin metaphor associated with the business man look and generic quality that distinguishes it. The suit does, however, carry codes of legitimacy which distort illegitimate behaviour (popular reading: “power-suit”). It is not that the “true” behaviour of the character resides underneath, but that the clothing carries along with it meanings which can further the motives of the characters. In cyborg style, Penguin carries a refined umbrella that, like a gun, can kill with bullets. Without a Catsuit or Batsuit equivalent to engender him
with superhero abilities, Penguin appropriates an enhanced cyborg extension: "It all comes down to who's holding the umbrella," he says.

Ideas of legitimacy evoked by the metaphor of the "bastard" take place in subtle variations of the notion of criminality and are linked to gendered reversals of power. Boundaries are progressively transgressed in terms of the distinction between city officials and gangsters. Where the corrupt city officials and gangsters appear to have everything in common in couplings locked "in a relationship of mutual interdependence, locked tight in their circle of power" (Lowentrouth 1992, 27), Catwoman springs out of that configuration.

The skyscraper and awning that Selina falls through, owned by Shreck, are projections of excess and legitimate (normalized) corporate criminal behaviour. Like a "cyborg Alice" (Haraway 1991a, 154) it is significant that Selina Kyle is transformed into Catwoman like Alice in 'Corporate' Wonderland, in a Gotham City which mirrors the strange and dream-like quality of Alice's fall into a different world. The fall, in Selina's case, is instigated by her evil boss, Max Shreck, who pushes her out the window of a skyscraper for discovering his criminal plot to build an unnecessary power plant. Selina falls through an awning, which has Shreck's corporate symbol of the cat, until she hits icy ground, where she is rescued by cats. The residue of corporate criminality attaches itself to her transformation where she "survives, her personality shattered, to become a criminal vigilante, Catwoman" (Newman, 48). Significantly, survival, fragmentation (shattered
personality), transformation and her criminal behaviour are connected to the strange and dark city’s architecture throughout the film (tall buildings are Catwoman’s potential death trap in the film) and the “legitimate” corporate criminal behaviour of Max Shreck and Penguin when he runs for mayor. Masks of legitimacy, however, do not disguise illegitimate behaviour; rather there is a play upon the meanings for that behaviour.

Catwoman is an illegitimate criminal compared to the criminal behaviour of those who maintain social power. Her criminal behaviour places her beyond the boundaries of the law, a notion which she articulates to Batman in one of the final scenes in Penguin’s underground cave, where she electrocutes Shreck with a kiss. “The law doesn’t apply to people like him or to us,” she says. Batman replies, “Wrong, on both counts.” As justice would have it, and in cyborg fashion, Max burns beneath Catwoman’s electric kiss and she is spared. The law, in terms of justice and life and death, counters Batman’s negative response: Catwoman exceeds the law on all counts, as a criminal vigilante and marginal subject. She exceeds the legitimate parameters for female/feline behaviour. In one scene “criminal” Catwoman appears just in time to rescue a woman from a rapist. In camp context she announces, “I am Catwoman hear me roar” and proceeds to scare him off.15

Boundaries for notions of legitimacy explode along with notions of legitimate boundaries in this film. Catwoman, Batman and Penguin rupture the boundaries of skin as the defining costume of identity. The cross-species
characters in *Batman Returns* cross the boundaries of human (civilized) and animal (primitive) through cross-species-dressing within S/M, and visibly show those boundaries to be convention. Reversals of recognition in cross-species-dressing resonate with reversals in power which occur on the level of identification with the human-self and animal-self and the fragmentation which blurs the distinction between human and animal form. Catwoman’s reference to being a “woman” while wearing a catsuit makes apparent the hybridized distinction. Before she is thrown out of Max Shreck’s (city) skyscraper window Shreck asks her, “What did curiosity do?” She replies, “I’m no cat.” She is subsequently transformed into Catwoman. In a rejection of his human roots the Penguin says to his carnival followers, “My name is not Oswald. It’s Penguin. I am not human. I’m an animal — cold blooded.” Identifying with the animal or human form is unstable as the form undermines and destabilizes categorization. Cross-species-dressing in *Batman Returns* plays upon notions of identity embracing the image of the cyborg, who as hybrid, subverts myths of origin and unity that structure Western culture. Meaning is distorted by the concept.

**Conclusion**

The notion of entangled identities and cyborg territories opens up the possibilities for drag in contexts which move beyond gender binaries and conventional boundaries. Crossings are made up of combinings which include expanding upon already broadened notions such as hybridization. For
example, this chapter showed that the hybrid, a notion which expands upon traditional binaries in new combinations, can be animal/animal, human/human or machine/machine. And beyond that, there are further interventions through couplings and sexual practices which move off directions located in an "appropriate" body or sex. Notions of truth and disguise play off each other in a dialogue which emphasizes not performance over existence as much as the changeable and permutational qualities available for performance in drag.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1 Fan testimonials in Diva magazine (June 1995) attest to the appeal of her look and the lesbian icon status she maintains. For example "Joelle" says: "The reason I like Tank Girl is that she looks just like me. . . . Our dyke look came before hers and that sort of fashion is an offshoot from the days of punk" (34). Her appeal is also cited in an article by Louise Carolin in the same magazine as spanning a variety of interested and different fans. The film's director, Rachel Talalay, says "She's more the strong woman type . . . not a dyke, more a bisexual kangaroo shagger" (33).

2 See Rebecca Bragg's article "Where to Get Organs for Transplant? Animal donors, cash for kidneys, raise ethical dilemmas," in The Toronto Star (12 July 1998: A 11). She relays that the problematic shortage of organ donors might be resolved by xenotransplantation in the next few years — "Grafting the organs of specially bred animals, most likely pigs, into human bodies." Over 3,500 transplant doctors and researchers met in Montreal for the 17th biannual World Congress for the Transplantation Society in July 1998. Dr. Calvin Stiller is quoted as saying that "The science of xenotransplantation is advancing so fast that within two to three years, the hearts, lungs and kidneys of pigs may routinely be grafted into human recipients."

3 Lois McNay describes a myth of the feminine in her chapter on "Power, Body and Experience" (1992, 22).

4 The references to fantasy genres appear throughout the film. For instance, when Tank Girl decides to rescue the 10 year old Sam from Liquid Silver she says, "To the Bat Cave!"

5 There are a considerable number of feminist interpretations of Foucault's usefulness in critiques of power and domination. (See Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault, Ed. Susan J. Hekman, 1996.) My attempt is not to provide an analysis of Foucault in relation to his writings on power and domination. Rather, my analysis resonates with the Foucauldian tradition of
moving off the Enlightenment rational of certain divisions as coherent and stable. S/M destabilizes the positions of female/submissive, male/dominant, for instance, and within a camp context renders them hyperbolic.

6 *Star Trek: The Next Generation*’s cyborg hybrid species the “Borg” maintain this notion as their calling card: “Resistance is futile: You will assimilate.”

7 Locating this fragmentation in “schizophrenia” is obviously not an ideal nor should fragmentation necessarily be reduced to that description.

8 Trinh, 62. Trinh discusses Strauss’ notion of bricolage with respect to anthropologists and notions of observation.


11 Even the actress who plays Catwoman is awarded hybridized cyborg status through connotations of breeding in her portrayal of the character: “Michelle Pfeiffer leaps into the film as Catwoman, giving birth to a whole new breed of femme fatale” (Magnuson 1992, 94).

12 “On all counts *Batman Returns* is a monster,” says *Variety* (McCarthy 1992, 56). Indeed, Haraway describes her boundary creatures literally as “monsters, a word that shares more than its root with the verb to demonstrate. . . . The power-differentiated and highly contested modes of being of monsters may be signs of possible worlds” (1991b, 21-22). In the film, the Penguin refers to Max Shreck and himself as “monsters” saying that the only difference between them is that Shreck is a “respectable” monster and Penguin is not.

13 Likewise, it has been noted that “to be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits” (Ross, 146).

14 Notions of recognition and disguise are disturbed and disturbing in Gotham City, a cyborg world. Notions of identity are bound up with rituals of recognition in the film which occur on several levels and within the context of Gotham City: “The city is perceived as a kind of dream space, a delirious
world of psychic projection rather than sociological delineation" (Lowentrout 1992, 25). I would add that a kind of dream space is what constitutes the cyborg world, most notably because Batman Returns' dream space refuses to reconcile recognition. In dream space, through rituals of recognition, the S/M relationship between Catwoman and Batman "threatens to reconcile their fractured personalities, but remains hauntingly unfulfilled" (Newman 1992, 49). Within this dream space or cyborg world, the potential for reconciled personalities like couplings is distinct from the idea of parts combining to make a whole. Rituals of recognition take place in the city, a triumph "of delirious unconscious desires. . . . Urban fears and fantasies surface in the weird architectural visions that are constantly being straight-jacketed by order and good sense, yet constantly break through to leave a residue of madness that gives the city its potency and charm" (Wollen 1992, 25). The "residue of madness" or excess that the Bat or Cat suit leaves behind can be found on bodies after fight scenes on the city's buildings. It is the residue from their various S/M scenes, bound up with the city in which these scenes are played out, which leaks and threatens recognition.

15 A review in Premiere comments, "Holy Helen Reddy! As Catwoman in this batty sequel, curvaceous Michelle Pfeiffer is a 90's . . . version of the '70's feminist chanteuse. . . . [She] claws and one-twos the guy so efficiently, she makes Arnold and Jean-Claude . . . look downright girlish" (Bibby 1992, 119). Catwoman exceeds the historical positioning of the feminist in the public eye, she is a 90's version, a criminal vigilante, which entails power and gender-bending. Catwoman opens up new possibilities for identification beyond traditional female/male gender binarisms in Hollywood film: She can hold her own with larger than life macho film heroes such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme. In a Harper's Bazaar fashion spread, Catwoman's costume is regarded as "high style," and "decked out from head-to toe in a slinky black catsuit-complete with knee-high lace-up boots and shiny elbow-length gloves — Catwoman is destined to become both
a cinematic and style trendsetter” (Magnuson 1992, 94). Catwoman has been appropriated, from multiple perspectives as a possible “new” feminist subject from the margins: an evidently powerful site for exceeding traditional and binary coding. Power, however, is manifest “illegitimately” within the already illegitimate confines of the term criminal.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has opened up the discourse on drag beyond the conception of cross dressing, a sartorial crossing of one gender onto another. Binaristic notions of gender located in sexual difference upon which cross-dressing is problematically based reinscribe traditional patterns which are often sought to be subverted through the practice of cross-dressing, to little if no avail. My analysis of the films in chapter two showed how traditional notions of gender do not get subverted but are rather reinscribed in films which appropriate the signs for drag but which, in fact, repeat cross-dressing's normative references. Likewise, performance metaphors for gender are often read as choice-driven, without taking into consideration the context of meanings within which performance operates. I have shown that drag embraces the normative discourses on gender by playing upon, layering and combining traditional codes, in camp. Theoretical limitations that have been set up for drag, such as those described in chapter three, have not considered the difference between cross-dressing and drag, where drag is collapsed into cross-dressing. I have shown through analyses of performances such as those of the Greater Toronto Drag King Society that there are extraordinary possibilities for camp in what were considered unlikely places, such as lesbian and feminist practice/discourse. Where identity is traditionally read as a coherent bi-product of sex, drag emphasizes the possibilities for permutations and proliferations in meaning for the historically produced body. Likewise, sexual practices which do not derive from stable body categories, as in chapters three
and four, challenge models which regard sexuality as unproblematically driven from an appropriate sex. Chapter four engaged the possibilities for the expansion of meanings for gender boundaries by opening up the field to hybridized crossings and combinings. Cross-dressing is a universe away from the destabilized boundaries of human, animal and machine in cross-species-dressing. Drag twists, entangles, layers and combines conventional notions of gender and sexuality into new meanings and expanded territories.
APPENDIX A

The Greater Toronto Drag King Society

Performance Chronology 1995

March 26  Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Alexander Street
June 25  Woody’s Bar, Church Street – Joy Lachica winner of Woody’s “Guy of 1995” at the Guy to Goddess AIDS Benefit
June 29  Drag King Invasion I at El Convento Rico Bar, College Street
        600 paid attendance, benefit for Lesbian/Gay/Bi Youth Line
July 2   Main Stage of Toronto’s Lesbian/Gay Pride Day
        approx. 650 000 in attendance
July 26  Claudia’s Cage C.D. Release Party at Horseshoe Tavern, Queen Street
August 1 Celebrity Bingo Benefit for MCC & PFLAG—Camping OUT
September 26 Opening Act for Carole Pope at El Mocambo, Spadina
October 26 Fund-raiser for Nightwood Theatre at El Convento Rico
        Featured Appearance in two local films pINCO Triangle & Nancy Boy vs. Manly Woman
October 31 Workshop and Performance for Queer Exchange: The
        Queer Avant-Garders — Drag in Toronto
November 17 Performance and Dialogue at a workshop and discussion for the University of Toronto’s Graduate Centre for Study of Drama
November 24 Drag King Invasion II: Festa Rex at the Opera House, Queen Street
December 16 Christmas Party at Woody’s for the Toronto Historical Bowling League
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