

**THE QUEER CARNIVAL: Gender transgressive images in contemporary Queer performance and their relationship to carnival and the Grotesque.**

Submitted by **Bruce Howard Bayley** to the **University of Exeter** as a thesis for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Drama**, (February 2000).

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Bruce Howard Bayley

## ABSTRACT

The starting point for this study was my MA research into dramatherapy interventions with young male clients whose self-images contained indicators of both male and female genders alongside one another and who identified with a kind of gender fluidity which put them outside the duality of the male-female gender system. This study is an exploration of contemporary Queer performers whose work can be seen as embodying positions similar to those taken by my dramatherapy clients.

PART ONE contains a description of the performances I observed and extracts from interviews conducted.

PART TWO consists of my analysis of the performances. After a discussion of the theories of gender identity that underpin my research, there follows a presentation of the terms 'gender transgression' and 'gender fluidity' and a consideration of the extent to which the gender transgressive images embodied in the work of these performers can be considered to be liminal and/or liminoid phenomena.

Continuing with an exploration of the term 'queer', its various usages, its development and its application in Queer Theory', the study goes on to identify criteria for Queer performance and analyze the performances in the light of these criteria.

After presenting general theories of the Grotesque, the study identifies the grotesque nature of the images presented by these performers, using a conceptual rather than a literal reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body.

Finally, the study looks at some of the ideas within the theory of carnival, starting with Bakhtin's idea of folk carnival culture, and whether or not gender transgressive Queer performance can be considered to be carnival. After a detailed examination of these performances in relation to carnival - as public occasion and performance, as *communitas* and as the subversive inversion of normality - as well as to notions of parody, travesty and burlesque, the study concludes that a number of characteristics of carnival are also present in these performances.

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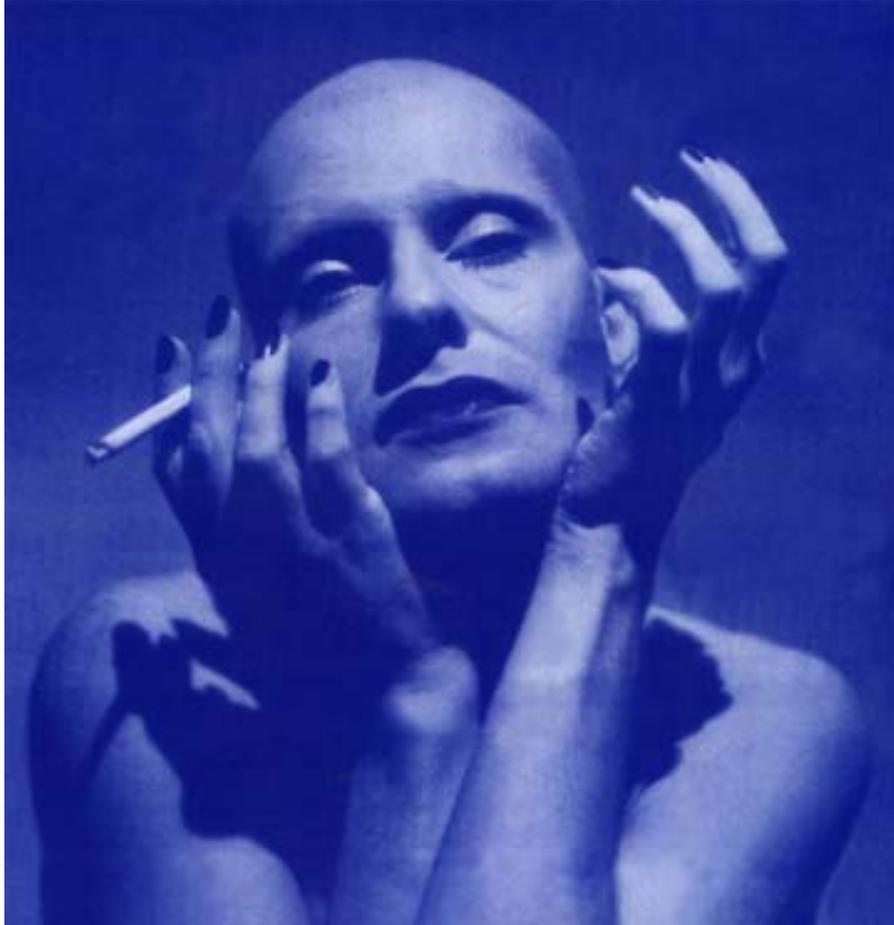


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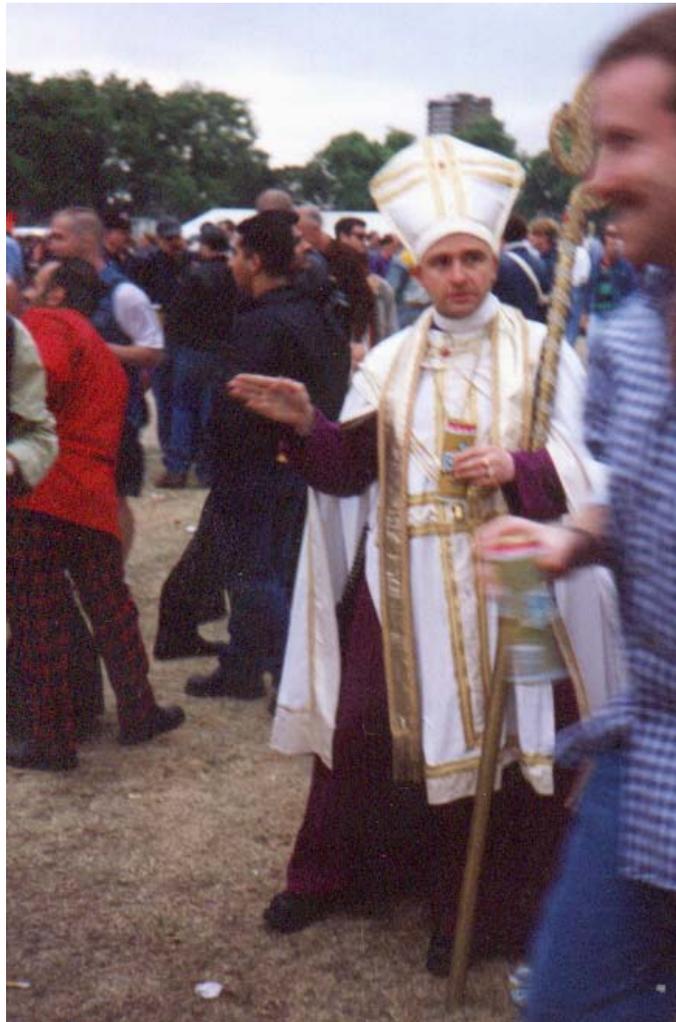


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**LIST OF DEFINITIONS**

A comprehensive list of definitions of key terms and concepts is included as an integral part of the Introduction to the thesis (p36)

## INTRODUCTION

The initial point of inspiration for this study was located at the heart of my MA Thesis, *Splitting and Mirroring: The process of Mimetic Enactment and Mirroring in addressing the split-gender role conflict of young, male, homosexual prostitutes*. This was a research study in dramatherapy and I drew on clinical material from my work practice with clients whose self-images contained indicators of both male and female genders alongside one another. The young, male clients identified with role models derived from the media, idealized and fantasy characters of the female gender, but they presented themselves as being divided between two, sometimes three, personae of differing genders at various times but without any loss of a fundamental identity. In other words, they were not manifesting the psychological states of dissociation or multiple personalities. They expressed ambivalence towards accepting either male or female gender behaviours and, equally, towards transexuality, in the sense in which this term means undertaking a sex-change operation - genital re-assignment surgery - which would take them towards a position of gender certainty. They

- a) adopted female personas with female names both in the sessions and in their life experiences while acknowledging themselves to be biologically males,
- b) assigned both male and female names to male genitals and other body parts,
- c) identified with female characters in pictorial material, written material and enactments within the dramatherapy sessions while also identifying themselves with male characters who may be presented within the same specific material or identified with in other material in other sessions,
- d) expressed ambivalence towards maleness, femaleness and transexuality,
- e) adopted clothing along the lines that suggested a split in gender stereotypy,

f) played roles, within dramatherapy enactments, of females characters presenting themselves as males and vice versa,

g) stated a preference for bisexual partners with whom the client would be identifying as being 'feminine' but who would be aware that the client was anatomically a male presenting a female persona,

h) would take on a 'feminine' role in sexual partnership while identifying positively with the potency and perceived 'largeness' of their penises.

What these people were saying was that they identified with a kind of *gender fluidity* which put them outside the duality of the male-female gender system. To this extent they may be considered to be gender transgressive.

The BBC's 'Q.E.D.' programme *Sex Acts*, broadcast in May 1995, featured a number of people who were born as either male or female but who, like my gender transgressive clients, also wish to live neither as male nor as female but with gender ambiguous identities, *in between genders*, as it were. Christie Elan-Cane and Zoltar Kattse, two of the individuals interviewed in the programme, were born women but had strong convictions that they were occupying the wrong kind of body. Christie did not feel he was a female but equally he did not feel that he was a male. After much suffering, research, painful experimentation and expense, Christie managed to approach a plastic surgeon who consented to perform a double mastectomy and a hysterectomy, removing the female-ness of his body. As Christie had no wish to be reassigned as a male there was no further surgery to provide him with a constructed penis. Zoltar Kattse was still awaiting his hysterectomy at the time of the programme's being broadcast. A third interviewee, Rachel O'Connor is a biological male but identified herself as a *transgenderist* living a double

life. When she presents as a man at work she uses a male name and dresses and is known as a man. At other times she is Rachel and presents and is acknowledged as a woman. During what she called her 'normal heterosexual relationship' with a woman, they gradually reversed their gender identities and roles, Rachel becoming more feminine and her female lover becoming more masculine. Here, there had been no surgery or hormonal treatment but changes of identity and the kind of gender transgressive behaviour that I had seen in my dramatherapy clinical practice.

In the sense that these individuals and my clients are living *between genders*, they embody qualities that Victor Turner has associated with 'liminal personae' (Turner, 1969). Just as these individuals can be identified as embodying states of liminality in terms of their gender transgressive positions, so also, can our entire society and culture be located in a period of transition - between two centuries and in between two millennia. Elaine Showalter deals with this subject in her book, *Sexual Anarchy* (1991). This is both a history of literature and of sexual change at the turn of the last century: a change in notions of sexuality and sexual roles that gave rise to a general *fin de siècle* alarm that the neat, established categories of gender would not easily be contained. Showalter indicates that such periods of transition give rise to notions that challenge existing systems and structures and that there is a concomitant rise in cultural insecurity which she calls 'the relentless specter of millennial change'. She suggests that there are parallels between the sexual anarchy at the turn of the last century and the gender crises at the turn of the current one:

Many of the stories of the *fin de siècle* are also case histories which describe deviance, rebellion and the abnormal...The 1980s and the 1990s also compulsively tell and retell the stories of the 1880s and the 1890s...Yet in retelling these stories

we transmit our own narratives, construct our own case histories and shape our own futures. (Showalter, 1991, p18)

The myths, texts and images that Showalter deals with in her book include themes of sexual and gender ambiguity, gender disruption and sexual surgery.

My perspective in this study has been that of a dramatherapist searching for images in contemporary performance that could be seen as embodying the positions taken by people like my dramatherapy clients and those included in the BBC's Q.E.D. programme *Sex Acts*.

In my examination of the transgressive aspects of my clients' and the performers' work, it has been necessary to give some consideration to the broad topic of gender itself, which is a more complex subject than can be fully considered in the context of the present thesis.

The early foregrounding chapters refer briefly, and as clearly as possible, to certain theories of gender and gender identity, though this thesis is not intended to be a study of gender theory. I am not concerned with deconstructing the terms 'identity', 'gender' or 'transgression' or engaging in detailed examinations of the discourses of Queer, Camp, Drag or Queer Theory. I have presented brief discussions of existing theoretical positions and terminologies in this thesis in order to

- a) facilitate the description of strategies employed by the performers,
- b) contextualize those aspects of the performers' work which they themselves have identified as arising out of their personal life situations and their own sense of themselves as gay, lesbian or Queer performers.

My subject is the work of the specific performers, their expressed intentions and the relationship the images used in their work may have to carnival and the grotesque. This

thesis is intended as a modest contribution to the history of performance. It describes and analyzes the work of a selected number of performers, which, taken collectively, may help to understand some of what is widely called Queer performance. Rather than focusing on an analysis of these performances with regard to their meaning and location within the context of historical or contemporary theatre, this thesis tries to emphasize the relationships between these performances and the performers' own life situations as well as the development, realization and performative expression of their personal identities in connection with their socio-political/sexual-political stances.

The performances studied are nearer to being performance art than dramatic performance: that is, the performers are primarily acting out of themselves rather than a text written by someone else. The relation of the performers' personal situations to their work, therefore, becomes an important factor in understanding both the work and its possible connections to Queer performance in general, since the socio-political agenda of the performers often arises not only out of real life concerns of their own but also from those of the various Queer communities and sub-cultures to which they may be related.

### **Questions addressed in this study**

In formulating my research focus the following questions arose which then became the bases for my analysis.

*What is the nature of the gender transgressive position taken by the individuals who reject the male-female gender binary and how do these performers embody this position in their performances?*

*To what extent can the gender fluid and gender ambiguous transgressive positions embodied in the work of these performers be better understood by applying the criteria of the liminal and/or liminoid?*

*What is the nature of 'queer', what is its place in Queer Theory and what are the characteristics of Queer performance?*

*To what extent can the notions 'Queer' and 'Queer performance' help in understanding the gender transgressive performers I have observed?*

*What is the relationship between drag and Queer gender transgressive performance?*

*To what extent can the work of these Queer gender transgressive performers be seen to relate to the Grotesque?*

*What relationship can Queer gender transgressive performance be said to have with carnival?*

### **The Methodology**

Between 1995 and 1998 I attended over 100 performances in a number of cabaret venues, pub theatres and cafes; I saw street performances and the work of some theatre companies whose productions exemplified gender transgressive images and material. Concurrently, I conducted interviews with eight of the performers whose work I had been observing continuously during my research.

I decided not to select those performers whose work involved:

- a) simple cross-dressing, where a performer of one gender is dressed as the opposite gender, as exemplified by traditional male or female impersonation;
- b) simple cross-gender character portrayals, where a performer of one gender assumes a character of the opposite gender who is placed within a specific, personal and fictional autobiographical narrative, as exemplified by Dame Edna Everage or Lily Savage;
- c) straightforward cross-gender casting, where performers of one gender are portraying characters of the opposite gender, such as in Declan Donnellan's all-male production of *As You Like It* for Cheek by Jowl Theatre Co.

I based this decision on the grounds that such straight substitutions of one gender for another are still playing within the parameters of the existing gender system, whereas my interest was to explore the work of those performers who intentionally set out to disrupt the duality of the male-female gender system and who can be perceived as speaking from a position which is not a fully unified, gendered one. I, therefore, only selected those performers whose performances can be said to be gender transgressive in the sense of being gender-anarchic, performers whose strategies utilize images and material that embody the transgression of the gender system itself. In searching for this material, I discovered that a very significant number of such performers were working in the performance field that has come to be known as Queer performance.

### **The Material**

The material of the research was drawn from interviews with performers and observations of their performances which took place in a variety of locations:

- a) traditional pubs featuring drag performances;
- b) the gay cabaret bar circuit, including the following pubs and bars in London: The Two Brewers (Clapham Common)

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern (Vauxhall)

The White Swan (Tower Hamlets)

The Cock (Kennington)

Duke's Bar (Kennington Lane)

Duckie's Club (Vauxhall)

The Connaught Brasserie (Holborn)

- c) the following theatres in London and Manchester:

The Drill Hall (Chenies St., London)

The Royal Court Theatre (Sloane Square, London)

Hoxton Hall Music Hall Theatre (Shoreditch, London)

The Green Room (Manchester)

d) on the streets, in parks, at outdoor neighbourhood venues and at celebrations including:

Queer Marriage Rituals

the Canonization of Queer Saints, at Gay and Lesbian Pride events

The St. Valentine's Day Pleasure Promenade at the Vauxhall, London.

While my selection might appear to be based on performers working in the South East of the country, the touring aspect of the performers' work means that the same or similar performances are seen in other metropolitan areas in the UK. Also, the recent tendency of Queer culture to 'spawn' itself extensively means that there is not a great degree of difference between performances of this nature to be found from region to region. In addition to this, the establishment of the *It's Queer Up North Festival* in Manchester has led to a certain degree of exchange of ideas, strategies and loose working partnerships between performers from the North and the South (indeed, globally, with Queer performers in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada). This has led to a similarity in performers' concerns and strategies in performance.

## **Organization of the thesis**

The thesis is organized in a form which is analogous to some anthropological models. It is presented in two parts:

PART ONE is a description of the 'field-work', which consists of observations of the performers and performances involved, descriptions of the venues in which the performances took place and extracts from interviews I conducted with those performers who made themselves available to me. Not all of these performers employ fixed texts and, as they have not been widely described previously, this descriptive section establishes a useful record/documentation of an important performance/theatrical phenomenon.

PART TWO is an analysis of the performers/performances in the contexts of certain broad theoretical concepts (see my working definitions below) using the most widely known and accepted terminologies in order to facilitate description and understanding of the strategies employed by the performers.

**a) Gender/Sex:** I have outlined some of the traditional notions of gender formation together with some of the major psychological and psychoanalytic theories of gender identity which underpin the prevailing male-female gender system to which I see these performers responding in a transgressive mode. I have used the term 'gender' to denote a social construct signifying socially prescribed indicators of masculinity/femininity, together with the social roles ascribed to these two positions, as well as to an individual's sense of being masculine or feminine. I have used the term 'sex' to refer to the biological attributes that constitute a male or female body.

**b) Gender transgression and gender fluidity:** I use the term ‘transgressive’ to describe any behaviour, presentation of behaviour or embodiment in performance that would stem from an individual’s refusal to conform to the categorizations, social roles and images that are implicit in any dominant hegemony, orthodoxy or neo-orthodoxy, eg. the term would be equally applicable to an individual’s non-conformity to the ‘rules’ of the heterosexual hegemony and to a gay or lesbian-identified individual’s refusal to conform to the ‘rules’ of the gay and lesbian cultures. By the term ‘gender transgression’ I mean any behaviour, or embodiment in performance that would stem from a refusal to conform to the categorizations and gender roles that are implicit within the male-female gender binary. It stems from an individual’s choice to ‘break the rules’ and may include ‘gender ambiguity’, ‘gender fluidity’, ‘transvestism’ and ‘transexuality’, in the sense that this implies ‘gender re-assignment’ treatment that would take an individual through a period of ‘gender ambiguity’ to eventual ‘gender certainty’ in his/her chosen gender. I employ the terms ‘gender ambiguity’ and ‘gender fluidity’ in the sense of Kate Bornstein’s use of them, according to which ‘gender ambiguity’ refers to an individual’s ‘refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code’ and ‘gender fluidity’ is the ‘refusal to remain one gender or another’ and an individual’s ‘ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change’ (Bornstein, 1994 p 52).

**c) Liminal/Liminoid:** I have employed the term ‘liminal’ in the sense of Victor Turner’s use of ‘liminality’ as applying to conditions that are necessarily ambiguous and his phrase ‘liminal personae’ to persons who elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space (Turner, 1969). I use the term

'liminal' with an emphasis on *social roles*, applying it to those positions that accept the 'rules' of the binary but which move temporarily outside them. I use the term 'liminoid' to refer to those positions taken by individuals which I see as attempts at 'transgressive' change beyond the binary, positions which seek to go further than accepted, marginalized exceptions to the 'rules' of the binary and which involve 'free choices' to attempt to subvert the binary.

**d) Queer:** The word 'queer' is used variously throughout this text: in the sense of it being a re-appropriation of a term once used as part of the derogatory name-calling of gay, lesbian and transgendered people; but also in the sense in which it has evolved within Queer Theory, where it is seen as a challenge to the dominant labelling philosophies as well as to the discrete gender categories embedded in the phrase 'gay and lesbian'; and in the sense that it 'is not an academic or rigorous category....it is unfixed and an intuitive one....' (Michael Wilson in *Rehearsals towards any future performance that would be-Queer*, 1995, p20). My use of the word 'queer' does not signify biological sex, anatomical structure, or specific sexual preference. I employ the uppercase 'Q' when I wish to acknowledge an individual's sense of personal identity - sexual or gender - and when I refer to particular communities, environments or sub-cultures.

**e) Drag:** My use of the term 'drag' does not involve the traditional sense in which it is equated with 'cross-dressing'. Rather I employ it in the way in which the performers in this study have defined it, as a performance form in its own right, perceived as deriving from burlesque, the Music Hall; as a strategy which is utilized transgressively as a kind of parody or travesty of gender; and as part of a personal and/or political process of

reclaiming identity from the male-female gender binary.

**f) The Grotesque:** Though I present a brief outline of the evolution of the term ‘grotesque’ in the relevant section in Part Two, my use of the term is mainly within the conceptual frame of Bakhtin’s ‘grotesque body’, my emphasis being on the process of degradation and the transgressive use of the contrast of opposites presented within the performances, e.g. the ‘ugly’ as ‘beautiful’, the ‘painful’ as ‘comic’, the ‘monstrous’ as ‘delightful’.

**g) Carnival/carnavalesque:** While I present an overview of various notions of carnival, I have restricted my use of the term to Bakhtin’s folk carnival culture. I distinguish between the terms ‘carnival’ and ‘carnavalesque’, employing the former to refer to public occasions which have peripatetic and, often, processional elements and which are comic celebrations that embody aspects of material and social transformation. The latter refers to events and performances that may have some implied relationship to carnival but which may not be justifiably considered to be ‘carnival’ in the stricter sense of that term. In the course of the research I found that exponents of Queer performance have either been placed or place themselves within a politically or socially subversive context. Some of them see the developmental roots of their performance originating in the political aspects of carnival, others claim a relationship with Fools and Clowns, others with Shamans, Freaks or Grotesques. As aspects of both the comic and the grotesque together have come primarily to be associated with Bakhtin’s writings on the carnival-grotesque in *Rabelais and His World* (1984), my analysis is to some extent based on concepts from Bakhtin adapted to this material.

The analysis of the performances is divided into four chapters:

**1. Gender Identity, Gender Fluidity and Liminality:** Starting with a presentation of theories of gender identity that are mainly derived from psychological and psychoanalytic literature, I consider the extent to which these performers can be said to embody gender transgressive positions - which include gender ambiguity and gender fluidity - in relation to the male/female gender binary, and the extent to which these embodiments can be considered to be liminal and/or liminoid phenomena as a frame within which to foreground my later examination as to the extent to which these performative strategies can be relatable to carnival which I see as liminal performance. I appropriate Turner's ideas on liminality/liminoidity as an aid in describing the performances. I am not simply deploying Turner's model in order to define notions deriving from gender theory or from Queer Theory. I use liminal/liminoid as a qualitative distinction as to the extent to which these performers can be considered to be liminal, in a 'no-man's-land betwixt-and-between....expressive of ambiguous identity' (Turner,1990, p11) and the extent to which they can be considered to be liminoid, freely and deliberately breaking boundaries in their transgressive positions in relation to the male/female binary. I then go on to consider, briefly, these performers' strategies from the perspective of Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionist approach to binary oppositions.

**2. Queer, Queer Theory and Queer performance:** Here I focus on those concepts and notions of the term 'queer' that are useful in defining and describing the performances researched, presenting various usages of the term and its development within Queer Theory. It is not my intention to present a critique or the discourses within Queer Theory nor to offer an exhaustive exposition of Queer Theory. I go on to consider

- a) the extent to which these performers can be said to be examples of Queer performance by exploring notions of Queer performance within ideas deriving from the work of Queer theatre practitioners and
- b) the place of drag in the work of these performers.

**3. Gender transgressive images in Queer performance and the Grotesque:** In this chapter I examine the extent to which gender transgressive Queer performance, as represented by these performers, can be said to relate to notions of the Grotesque, with particular reference to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

**4. The Queer Carnival:** Here I explore the extent to which gender transgressive Queer performance, as represented by these performers, can be said to relate to carnival, with particular reference to Bakhtin's notions of folk carnival culture, confining the study to the following aspects of the performers' work:

- a) images used and the extent to which they bear a relation to Bakhtin's 'grotesque body';
- b) the subversive content/political undermining of the dominant culture;
- c) the genres adopted - performance styles, language and strategies employed;
- d) the environments utilized;
- e) the performer/ audience dynamics involved.

I use a 'conceptual' rather than literal reading of Bakhtin's terms and not as criteria which must be met but as concepts which might be useful in analyzing these performers' work.

**PART ONE**

## **PART ONE**

### **THE PERFORMERS AND THE PERFORMANCES**

This section contains brief descriptions of the performers, of the venues and full accounts of the performances I observed. Following these descriptions, I have presented extracts from interviews I conducted with those performers who made themselves available to me. I have included the full interviews in Appendix A. Scripts of performances and ritual ceremony performances, where they have been made available to me, have been included in Appendix B.

#### **A. TITTI LA CAMP**

His real name is Richard Byrne and he performs on the gay cabaret circuit as ‘Titti La Camp, the Nanny from Hell’. He calls himself a ‘drag Queen’ and has been influenced by and influences several other drag performers - Sassy Stryker, Ceri Dupres etc. His performances incorporate drag, the use of grotesque costumes and mechanical toys, clowning, tumbling, juggling, slap-stick and the grotesque caricaturing of established female singers - notably Olivia Newton John, Lulu, Karen Carpenter, Bjork, Tina Turner and Julie Andrews - to whose recordings he would mime (lip-sync).

#### **The Venue: The Two Brewers, Clapham High St., South London.**

The Two Brewers in Clapham, South London is a gay pub traditionally known for gay cabaret entertainment, especially drag performances. There are two bars, one with a disco and the other for cabaret. There is continuous movement of people between the two bars. The disco music from the dance bar is loud and constantly heard in the cabaret bar whether or not a performance is in progress. The audience in the cabaret bar is, therefore,

constantly shifting, depending on whether people wish to watch the show or move away to the disco bar. Some of the audience are seated at tables placed around the walls of the bar but many are standing in front of the performance area which is a small stage mounted in the corner of the bar. There is a long, elevated platform, the same height as the stage, that serves as a cat-walk type of entrance to the stage along the back wall, to the one door that serves as entrance and exit for the performer. There is a small flight of three or four steps at the front of the stage allowing access between the performance and the audience areas and a similar set of steps at the end of the cat-walk. Apart from elevation, the performance area and the cat-walk are delineated from the audience area by a number of lights focused on them from the ceiling of the audience area. The general lights in the bar serve as House Lights at the start and finish of the performances. On the wall, stage left of the stage, hangs a notice board with the forthcoming week's programme of events. It is in the form of a Hymn List Board found in churches. Names of performers for each night are slipped in and out of the relevant day's slot. The Master of Ceremonies (MC) for the evening refers to these entries as 'the Parish Notices'.

### **The Performance (May 1996)**

As the general lights go down the MC welcomes the audience and requests introductory applause for Titti La Camp whom he introduces as a 'divine lady'. Titti's show consists of a highly energetic and very fast-moving presentation of a series of characters in a cartoon/burlesque style. At various times she will present either an exaggerated version of a specific female singer or a *pastiche* of several singers. There is no speaking, no verbal dialogue with the audience and no singing. She 'lip-sync/mimes' to recorded music and employs mainly grotesque costume, plenty of buffoonery, tumbling and acrobatic clowning

and a bizarre assortment of props, mechanical toys and food.

The opening music is Mary O'Hara's rendition of *One Day At a Time, Sweet Jesus*. A small, bespectacled nun in a black habit with an enormously out-sized cross on a chain around her neck runs amongst the audience and up the small steps on to the stage in a gangly and swirling manner. The effect is rather like a bat out of Hell. On stage she leaps and whirls around, shifts her large cross, lifts her habit to expose two bare, hairy legs and extracts a large bottle of gin/vodka which she proceeds to drink while miming to the words, her head shaking constantly, her mouth open, her tongue lolling from side to side as she leaps and whirls around the stage in a frenzied dance. As the dancing gets more furious she brandishes the bottle of gin/vodka in the air as if it is a weapon in a duel, drenching herself, the audience and the stage until it is so wet that dancing becomes impossible and it turns into a sliding back and forth across the stage. The audience are applauding enthusiastically as she trips, slips, collides into the wall at the back of the stage area and continues whirling and drinking until the bottle is empty, her habit is soaking, the stage is completely wet and Mary O'Hara's song comes to its end. Titti then takes a few frenzied bows and runs/slides off stage.

In a very few moments, she returns wearing a tight red two-piece suit (with a mini skirt) and a red wig. The music is Lulu's *Boom Bang-A-Bang, Boom Bang-A-Bang!*, one of the United Kingdom entries for the Eurovision Song Contest in the 1960s. Titti's entrance is slow and steady as she strides somewhat menacingly along the entire length of the catwalk. She is clutching a large, brightly shiny red bag. Throughout the miming of the words of this song, Titti has a fixed grin that never leaves her face as she strides across the

stage. She makes no attempt to mouth the words of the song with any accuracy at all. The effect is macabre. As the song proceeds she puts her hand into her bag extremely slowly and pulls out a prop - a hand with blood edging its wrist and dripping down its fingers. She casually tosses it into the audience. They scream and move away from the stage. She then extracts from her bag a large blood-stained kitchen knife, a revolver and a hand grenade. As she produces each object she plays with it precariously as if she is about to drop it on the audience but then tosses it carelessly on to the stage where it will lie until the end of the show. The last object produced is an extremely long 'reefer' cigarette which she lights up on the stage and smokes *à la Bette Davis*, with her arms outstretched and with sudden bursts of exhalation, letting all the smoke stream into the faces of the first row of the audience. Her grin by this time has turned into a grimace as the song comes to an end and she strides off along the cat-walk.

Titti's next entrance is, again after only a few moments, along the entire length of the cat-walk. This time she has a guitar slung over her shoulder and a cloth bag with a long shoulder strap hanging on her arm. She is dressed in a long, light-coloured dress of flimsy material in the style of the early 1970s. She wears a long, light brown wig with a head-band holding it in place. As the music to Karen Carpenter's *I'm On the Top of the World*, plays she begins to mime the words while strumming the guitar and swaying side to side, letting the long wig swing gently around her shoulders. As Karen Carpenter's voice sings the opening words:

I'm on the top of the world  
looking down on creation....

a slow beatific smile spreads across her face. The effect is one of gentle, Hippie bliss. As

the song continues, Titti removes from her bag various items of food - an apple, a chocolate bar, two chocolate bars, several buns, an entire string of sausages. She stuffs these into her mouth one after the other until she can stuff no more in, letting the overflow fall all over the stage. The guitar playing is abandoned but the 'miming' of the words continues. As each item of food is stuffed into the mouth, her face appears to get redder puffier; bits of food are smeared across her cheeks, into her ears, over her nose and around her eyes. She then proceeds to 'vomit' the food all over her dress front, the stage and the audience. The process, from the first item of food to the last, builds like a gradual *crescendo* as the music gets louder and louder. The audience is variously disgusted, very responsive, applauding and cheering or grimacing and moving away into the next bar or to positions of relative 'safety'. As the song and the miming continue she begins to spit out various particles of food that have been concealed in her mouth. Some of these land on her dress front, some of them are targeted out into the audience. The next round of 'gorging' begins with a packet of chocolate powder which she proceeds to gobble ferociously straight out of the packet. The powder spreads all over her face, her hair, the dress. She pats it around with her hands and smears it all over her face. She is now beginning to resemble a powdered clown. She next proceeds to gobble cream from an aerosol canister. She sprays the cream all over her face and licks it off her chin and her cheeks. She sprays the cream into the audience. She is now looking grotesque - the chocolate powder together with the cream have blotted out most of her features. Her eyes are beginning to look like hollows and her mouth and tongue, which she begins to protrude more and more, are dark brown with the chocolate powder - a startling and ghoulish contrast to her whitened, cream-laden face. The stage by now has become extremely messy and slippery with the food and cream, the remains of the Lulu props and the wetness

from the Drunken Nun's 'alcohol'. She laughs and slides her way off the stage, to resounding applause, in a state resembling ecstatic frenzy as Karen Carpenter's song comes to its final words:

The only explanation I can find  
is the love that I found  
ever since you've been around  
leaves me feeling that I'm top of the world!

The next interlude is slightly longer than the previous ones, and when Titti appears again she is clean, wearing a very short, tight, skimpy dress, shoes with very high heels and a long, dark, straight wig. She strides on very confidently to Bjork's song *It's Oh So Quiet!*

The song is structured around two sections - a very quiet section where Bjork whispers 'Ssh! Ssh! It's Oh so quiet!' which is followed by a very loud section when the music suddenly bursts out into 'wild' brass, wind and percussion instruments and Bjork belts out the words. These sections are repeated several times in Bjork's song, each repeat of the loud section getting louder and faster. Titti's performance during this item reflects the two sections. In the quiet section she strides around the stage lifting her finger to her lips as if exhorting the audience to share a secret. It is during the loud section of the song that Titti's performance 'takes off'. As the percussion is sounded she whirls, *pirouettes*, high kicks *à la Can Can*, slides across the stage, cartwheels, flings her body against the back wall of the stage, leaps off the stage into the audience, leaps back on to the stage, flings her body towards the stage left wall, knocks down the Hymn List Notice Board with her arm as if by accident, *ricochets* against the wall, rebounds, whirls against the stage right wall and, finally, cartwheels her way across to centre stage. The effect is that of a combination of American cheer leader, clown, circus tumbler and ice-skater. Suddenly the quiet section repeats itself. Titti stops just as abruptly and resumes her regular striding and whispering

gestures until the loud section starts again and she once more resumes her acrobatics, but this time at a faster pace. As the song increases in volume, Titti's acrobatics take on an absurd level of rapidity until the song ends in a very loud final phrase of music when Titti does the splits on the slippery stage, leaps up and slides all the way along the cat-walk and off stage.

For her next item, Titti appears, to Olivia Newton-John's song *Totally Devoted To You*, in a long and capacious light-coloured dress and a wavy blond wig. This piece is a return to the grotesque, Gothic, 'bad taste' of the Karen Carpenter item. Whereas in that item Titti used a variety of foodstuffs, in this piece she employs various unsuccessful means of death or suicide. As the song proceeds, Titti produces from her capacious dress a knife with which she mimes slitting her wrists, a syringe with which she mimes injecting herself, bottles of pills which she gobbles down, letting them scatter all over the stage and audience, a piece of rope which she puts around her neck and performs a grotesque mime of repeatedly hanging herself by falling off a chair and a pistol which she puts to her head but which doesn't work. The most ghoulish image in this piece occurs when she opens her mouth wide having chewed on a concealed blood pellet. The blood streams out of her mouth, down her chin, throat and white dress as she continues to mime the words of the song, shaking her body about in a grotesque display of 'death throes' as she makes her exit.

Titti's last appearance is her *pièce de résistance*. She is billed in the gay press as 'The Nanny from Hell' on the strength of this piece for which she has become well known on the Queer Cabaret circuit. The music for this piece is Julie Andrews' song *Feed The Birds* from the musical *Mary Poppins*. Her costume for this is an elaborate 'structure'. It is

extremely capacious. The blouse around the bust consists of two flower-boxes stuffed with artificial flowers, a necklace of fruits hangs around her neck. The very full green skirt is decorated with flowers and feathers. She wears a boa/stole around her shoulders. Her shoes are little pot plants. The entire ensemble is topped with a head-dress that consists of a large bird-cage complete with toy birds on miniature swings. The audience applauds very responsively at her very entrance as she makes her way sedately along the cat-walk smiling benignly with several plastic carrier bags in each hand. The overall effect is a combination of a pantomime dame, a 'bag-lady' and a character in carnival costume. As the song starts she mimes the words, smiling sweetly, and produces two mechanical bird toys (bright yellow chicks) from her bag. She winds them up and sets them on the stage to wander about noisily and randomly wherever they go. She then produces packets of bird-seed from her bag and scatters it over the stage. She then extracts several bread rolls which she breaks up into small pieces and tosses daintily over the stage and into the audience. As the song continues the pieces of bread begin to get larger until large chunks of bread, and finally complete rolls, are thrown wildly at the audience, many of whom respond by throwing them straight back. Some of the bread lands in her flower-box 'bust', some in her face. One of the mechanical chicks has collided with her foot. Its metal wings are flapping fruitlessly. She gives it a gentle kick and sends it buzzing on its way into another random direction. As Julie Andrews' voice sweetly croons:

Feed the birds  
Tuppence a bag  
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag!

Titti, still smiling benignly, produces a box of Kentucky Fried Chicken pieces which she proceeds to eat while miming the words. As she comes to the end of each piece of chicken she hurls the bones into the audience who either move away or hurl them straight back.

She proceeds through several pieces of chicken. One of the mechanical birds becomes wedged between the edge of the stage and the flight of steps leading down. She picks it up and mimes feeding it the fried chicken. As it does not eat it, she looks at it, grimaces and hurls the toy bird to the floor. It lands on its back, its wings and legs flapping helplessly. The second bird, having colliding with a wall and spun around, now makes it way across the stage until it reaches the bird that is on its back. It 'mounts' the supine bird. The resulting action is of two mechanical birds having sex, wings and legs flapping about in the air. Titti mimes mock horror at the 'fornicating' birds and mimes kicking them apart. The hurtling of chicken bones continues between Titti and the audience until the song comes to an end and Titti, still smiling sweetly, exits along the cat-walk to very appreciative applause. The audience continues to throw bread, bits of chicken and bones on to the stage as the mechanical birds randomly dart about the stage, colliding into objects, stopping and starting again. The lights go down. It is the end of Titti La Camp's performance. The audience applauds and cheers and, despite some jeers and 'boos' of disapproval, she is asked to perform an *encore*.

For her *encore*, Titti appears in a short black dress with a short bobbed wig and flat shoes. She seems to have very large padding in her bust. The music is Edith Piaf's song *Je ne Regrette Rien*. She begins by 'miming' the words in an emotionally exaggerated manner to the point where her veins are sticking out in her throat. One verse into the song, she puts her hand into her bust and pulls out a very large onion. From under her skirt she extracts a short paring knife and starts to peel and chop the onion in short sharp actions, stopping every now and then to shove pieces into her mouth or toss them into the audience. Halfway through one onion she discards it on to the stage and extracts another and

continues the actions while miming the words. After three or four onions have been mutilated in this way, her eyes have started to water. She wipes them with her hand spreading the onion juice into her nose. Her watering eyes and sniffing nose are wiped and blown in her skirt as she discards the knife on the floor and finishes the song tearfully in a melodramatic manner, sniffing and shoving bits of onion into her mouth. The song ends, the lights go off. When they come on again, Titti La Camp is no more. The wig and hair-net have been removed and Titti has transformed into Richard Byrne in front of the audience. It is Richard who now bows and thanks the audience verbally. These are the only words spoken by the performer throughout the evening.

### **Interview Extracts**

TC: Well, at the very beginning my local pub used to be the King William up in Hampstead and they used to put on Pantos and things like that. And someone asked me to do something small in that as one of the Ugly Sisters and I did that and it was fun. I discovered that I enjoyed it and liked performing but I didn't do anything until about six months later, on Gay Pride night, they asked me if I would work a couple of numbers and that's when I first got together the number I still do called *Feed the Birds* from *Mary Poppins* and that went down very well. People started saying that was really sick in the bits where I bring out the chicken and throw the bones at the crowd. Someone said I should keep doing things like that. Then the *Black Cap* pub had a talent competition in the November of that year and people kept coming to me and saying that I should enter it and so I did. So I was really responding to what other people I knew were asking me to do. I'm not sure I would have got into it on my own steam, as it were. So that's how I came up with the Karen Carpenter number and I won the talent competition on that idea. And an agent said to me that if I worked some more numbers like that he would work me. And my problem came then because before that time people would say do these numbers or those numbers and I'd do it because I enjoyed it but as soon as you're getting paid for it you start thinking differently about it as 'work' in a way. I used to do things like taking the "mickey" out of Jesus Christ with nails between my hands and things like that but once I decided that I wanted to do this for a living then I was aware that there was a line that you can't really cross over. Then I also realized that it was because of those numbers that I was getting booked. So the other numbers like the one I do where the Drunken Nun does *One Day at a time*, *Sweet Jesus* needed to be toned down. The idea was to get reactions from the audience to being spat on and having things chucked at them and things like that.

So after a while of thinking about what I was actually doing I decided not to worry about it but to just be sick and my show to be an unashamedly sick show.

BB: What about your background? Did you have any training or experience in singing, acrobatics, clowning or anything like that?

TC: No, not at all. Only a bit in school, I suppose. School plays and things like that but that was when I was twelve or something very young.

.....

BB: You use the word 'sick' a lot. I'd like you to expand on the use of the word 'sick' in describing your work. What are the elements that go into your definition of the word 'sick'?

TC: I probably use the word 'sick' to describe my show because that's the word everyone throws at me. It's sort of been thrust on me. As I say the first number, *Feed the Birds*, the Julie Andrews number, was when I sat down and thought about what I was going to do I didn't intend it first of all to be sick. I just did what I thought I would find funny. As soon as I did that everyone began to say how sick it was, the feeding the birds lyric together with the chucking bread to the audience as if they were the birds then the taking out the fried chicken pieces and eating them and then chucking the bones at the audience while these sweet Julie Andrews lyrics were going out. And then because people started saying that it was 'sick' and also that they wanted more of it, I then thought up the Karen Carpenter number as a response to that. Sassy Stryker keeps saying he can see why I do that sick number or the other sick number because he thinks I like to shock people. I don't actually see that myself. I don't think I do like to shock but I do like to get a reaction and I prefer a strong reaction to a mild one. I do like to incite a reaction, whether of laughter or anger I don't really mind.

BB: I think a lot of what you do is very, very interesting in terms of the clowning and the parodying and the slap-stick that goes on in your show. Sometimes I see your show and it's absolutely awful in that it's flat or the responses of the audience or yourself are slow and cold etc. etc. and at other times it works extremely well and it's magic and people are shouting, sometimes with anger and sometimes with pure joy. You've just said you want reactions from people. Your show seems to become alive when there are people reacting strongly to it. I actually saw a show of yours at the *Two Brewers* pub and the audience started getting restless from your Lulu number, *Boom Bang-a-Bang* and throughout the Karen Carpenter song, *I'm On The Top of the World*, up until *Feed the Birds* this small section of the audience got angrier and angrier and ended up throwing ash-trays and bones back at you furiously and shouting abuse like 'wanker' and 'fuck off'. Whatever buttons they may be you were certainly pressing some buttons with these people. You certainly seemed to be provoking anger in these people.

TC: Yeah, it does seem to take some people that way. I don't know why they would

react so strongly but it gives me energy when they do. And I think everyone else goes away with something then. I don't do it to provoke anger intentionally. I would much rather people reacted as strongly but not in anger, of course.

BB: The image you present when you do *Feed the Birds* with the bird cage on your head, the flower-boxes in your tits, the clock-work birds you set off across the stage - did you present it like that from the very first performance?

TC: Oh, no. The first time I did that I didn't have the bird-cage. I used tiny little jumpy birds that I needed to kick all over the stage to activate them. As I performed it I responded to some things from the audience like an impromptu visual gag and developed them as part of the number in the show. Yeah, the numbers grow as I do them. With *Feed the Birds* the first time I wore a plain long black dress and a grey wig, all terribly tatty. I carried a large red bag with three wind-up toy birds which I hammered on stage with a hammer. It was altogether an older person I was presenting. And then the bird-cage idea came a lot later and the flower pots in the breasts were an idea given to me by Ceri Dupree.

BB: They look as if they're structured into the dress.

TC: Yeah, they're Ceri's creations. She actually made them and gave them to me which was very good of her. But coming back to audience reactions. I travel up and down the country and get a different reaction all the time. It usually works very well in Birmingham for some reason. It can work brilliantly in one venue at one time and then at another time at the same venue it will just die a death.

BB: So what makes it work well for you?

TC: It's not so much the audience reaction. It's how I perform the show. Most of the time, if I get a really great reaction what I do then is infectious throughout the whole audience. I don't ever aim to please everyone out there. If some people don't laugh, that doesn't bother me at all. I always offend someone out there, anyway. When I first started it used to shock me. I remember doing the *White Swan* pub and some guy came up to me afterwards and said, 'Are you planning to do that Karen Carpenter thing again?' and when I said yes, he started crying in front of me and told me that his sister had died of bulimia and I had to say quite straight, 'I certainly don't find bulimia a funny subject. I'm not aiming this at bulimia in any direct way or you or your sister. Why don't you think about why most people out there are laughing at it?'

BB: Why do you think most of the people were laughing at the Karen Carpenter performance? It *is* quite gross and so is the Olivia Newton John one.

TC: I still don't know, really. They just do. I could sit here and invent some kind of argument that might sort of explain that.. but I can't really come to a decision about that. But I always see all comedy happening at the expense of someone or something or other. And with that I just take it to an extreme. And I think people

laugh at what scares them probably. Or if they become detached from it they can laugh at it. But I can't say I could tell you for sure.

## **B. DAVE LYNN AND MICHAEL TOPPING (MALITZA)**

Dave Lynn (not his real name) has worked for twenty years on the gay cabaret circuit, in 'straight' pubs and clubs, in Music Hall theatres and in stage shows such as *Treading the Boards* for which he collaborated with Michael Topping (aka Malitza). I have only included those performances which he did with Michael Topping prior to their splitting up in 1997. Most of Michael's work has been as an accompanist for other cabaret performers, including George Logan (aka Dr. Evadne Hinge of Hinge and Brackett). His cabaret performance career began in 1967 when he derived the name 'Malitza' from Militza Korjus, a coloratura soprano. I have only included his performances as 'Malitza' with Dave Lynn. Their performances incorporated drag, songs, monologues (scripted and improvised), Bowdlerized passages from traditional musical shows and play texts and various forms of clowning.

### **The Venue: The Two Brewers pub (p43)**

The audience area of the Two Brewers' Cabaret bar has been laid out more like a cabaret restaurant or cafeteria than the usual open space. There are a number of tables scattered around with checked table-cloths and candles in glass containers. There is standing and sitting room further away from the stage and around the side walls of the bar. The stage area is empty apart from a set of keyboards, two microphones - one at the keyboards, one placed centre stage front - and glittery decorations all along the back wall.

### **The Performance (February 1996)**

As the MC introduces Dave Lynn and Malitza they come in along the cat-walk to introductory applause. Dave Lynn wears a long sequined skirt and a waist-coat that seems to match, but a closer look reveals that it is of a slightly different sequined fabric and is cut like a man's rather than a woman's. He does not appear to wear false breasts. He wears a long, wavy, reddish-brown wig and glamorous face make-up. Fish-net stockings/tights are visible through the long slit down the side of his skirt and he wears red sequined high-heeled shoes that look a little short of being stilettos. Throughout the performance he is addressed and refers to himself as 'Dave Lynn', 'a Queen' or 'a Jewish Queen' - never as a 'lady', 'a woman' or as 'she'. Malitza is dressed in a fairly dowdy two-piece suit in a vaguely flowery print that looks obviously like a woman's suit, matching skirt and top with frilly blouse underneath. She carries a dull-looking black handbag. Her face is also made-up but in a somewhat careless way - the lipstick is a bit off her lips, the rouge and powder look as if they have been slapped on in a hurry and she appears to have overdone the blusher on her cheeks. On a closer look one can see that she has not taken much trouble to conceal the unshaved 'shadow' of facial hair on her top lip and along her jaw-line. She wears spectacles and a wig that has been somewhat roughly styled in a short 'bob'. She sits at the keyboards and immediately begins with a roll on the keys.

Dave Lynn takes the central microphone and they start right into the opening number *Willkommen* from the show *Cabaret* which Dave Lynn 'belts' out and which locates the evening in the kind of cabaret associated with Sally Bowles' and Isherwood's inter-war Germany. It also gives Dave Lynn a starting point for his introductory patter in which he immediately includes his Jewishness and his gayness with 'What's a nice Jewish Queen

doing with this German shit!’ After welcoming the audience he ‘warms them up’ with a series of questions, picking out various sections of the audience. As various members of the audience respond he counters each reply with quick repartee:

*-Are there any Jewish people in tonight?*

A man in the corner puts his hand up. Dave shades his eyes from the light and says:

*-Come here, let me see you*

The man steps forward.

*-Well, at least you’re a cut above the rest! Any straight people in - any heterosexuals?*

A small group at one of the tables identify themselves. He picks out one of the women in the group and says:

*-You won’t be lucky! Is this your boyfriend? He is! Well, I know something about him you don’t!*

and then to the boyfriend:

*-I’ll see you later!*

*-Any l-l-l-l-lesbians in tonight? (flicking his tongue up and down in a licking motion) I enjoyed that. I’ll do it again! L-L-L-L-L-L-LESBIANS! (he almost spits the word out)*

A couple of women to one side nod energetically, one of them holding up a pint of beer.

*-You are, are you? Well, you see this lovely lady in the front here? (indicating the woman at the table of heterosexuals) She’s going to be dead disappointed by the time the night’s out... do you think you could...?*

He turns to the heterosexual woman:

*-What’s your name, darling?...That’s a bloody mouthful!....*

After some minutes of this kind of banter with the audience, Dave proceeds to make derogatory comments about the bar as he comes down from the stage and walks about the among the audience - he light-heartedly mocks the lights (‘reminds me of the black-out’), the curtains (‘like something Malitza threw out of her wardrobe last summer’), the drink

and hospitality ('who does a girl have to suck to get a drink around here') and Malitza herself:

*Lately people have been mistaking her for Rosemary West. Do you think she looks like her? She DOES look like her? It's her eyes, isn't it? That wild staring look. Well, there's one thing they DO have in common - they both like children!*

There is a shriek from a member of the audience. Dave changes to good-hearted self-mockery and charming apologies.

*I'm terrible, aren't I? A mouth like the cottage in Barking she got picked up in last week-end? (Note: 'cottage' in gay parlance is 'toilet') I'm only joking. It's nice to see you all here. Mind you what a nice Jewish Queen like me is doing here... Have I told you about my mother..she's a real Jewish mother..*

He goes straight into a story about his mother, his aunt, their shopping habits, his shopping habits, and Malitza plays the introduction to the next song which is *Mama*. During the song a male member of the audience crosses the area in front of the stage and makes his way to the toilet exit. Dave takes him in, eyes him up and down, leers at the audience, licks his lips, comes down the steps of the stage and follows him half-way along the floor, turns back and interrupts the song, laughing, and says:

*Thinks she'll be lucky.*

Malitza, picking up on the cue immediately, starts the opening of *Maybe This Time*. Dave bursts out:

*-Wonder where her boyfriend is tonight? (A member of the audience shouts something. Dave steps forward into the audience.)  
-What's that? Oh, you ARE the boyfriend! Well, what the fuck are you doing here? I've seen you on the Common, haven't I? No really, I live in Brighton. Hey, have any of you been on the gay beach in Brighton and seen Maisie? (Maisie Trollette is a very well-known drag performer with whom Dave and Malitza have worked on occasion). Poor thing, don't laugh, she can't help it... up to her neck in sand. Hoping she won't be recognized.*

Dave starts to sing *Maybe This Time*. The man returns from the toilet. Dave, continuing to sing, follows him with his eyes. When the song comes to an end, Malitza starts into the

introduction to *My Old Man*. Dave sings the first verse straight out to the audience. This is a regular item of their performance and the audience, many of whom are regulars to their performances, know that Dave will go on to do a medley of clownish impersonations of various show business personalities singing this song, taking his cue from members of the audience who call out famous names. Dave repeats these names and goes into his 'impersonations' while Malitza, where necessary, alters the musical style. The 'impersonations' include:

*Lily Savage*: Dave pulls his skirt up to his crotch, pulls a scowling face and bawls the song in a raucous voice with a Birkenhead accent, peppering the lyrics with words like 'fuck', 'shit' and 'bugger'.

*Shirley Bassey*: Dave protrudes his lips, shakes his head and squirms his body around waving his arms in the air and sings the song with Bassey's well-known quivering voice.

*Kylie Minogue*: Dave gets on his knees (a reference to Kylie's shortness) and bobs his way up and down the stage.

*Roy Orbison*: Dave covers his eyes.

*Cleo Laine*: Dave pulls his hair in front of his face, crosses to the stage curtains and drapes them round his body, lifting the microphone into the air and sings 'jazzy' jibberish.

*Danny La Rue*: Malitza immediately changes the song to *On Mother Kelly's Doorstep* and Dave sings this extremely loudly with Danny La Rue's 'posh' throaty voice, interrupting once or twice to declaim: - *ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE YAHS IN THE BUSINESS* (a mockery of one of La Rue's lines.)

*Lena Zavaroni*: Dave walks off leaving the microphone alone on the stage (a reference to Zavaroni's thinness - anorexia?)

*Kathy Beale*: Dave plunges the mike down his throat bobbing it in and out (a reference to a contemporary scandal involving oral sex in a public place in which Gillian Taylforth, the actress who played Kathy Beale in *Eastenders*, was implicated.

*Patsy Cline*: Dave turns, spreads his arms out like a plane and runs straight into the wall behind him.

Malitza brings the whole series to an abrupt end by banging loud chords on the keyboards and giving a very loud yawn. Ignoring this completely Dave launches into:

*Did I ever tell you the story about my bar mitzvah?...*

Malitza bellows a very low note in an extremely deep bass baritone voice and holds it for about a minute. The audience and Dave are reduced to laughter. When Malitza finally ends the note, Dave tells the audience that it is Malitza's spot now and he leaves the stage. Malitza brightens up visibly and performs three songs. The first is a rather merry version of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Poor Wandering One* (from *The Pirates of Penzance*), in which the words are altered and the final line ends with a triumphantly delivered:

*I CAME IN A TAXI TONIGHT!*

Malitza's twinkling eyes and lascivious smile leave the audience in no doubt of the sexual implication behind the line and there is uproarious laughter and applause. The second song is Malitza's own version of *The Girl from Ipanema* which is altered to *The Boy from Brighton*. The third is Malitza's version of *That Man of Mine* in which the crude sexual references are left blank. The pause and the rhyming metres, however, leave very little doubt of what the word is meant to be and the audience fills the word in, for instance:

*Fish gotta swim  
Pigs gotta grunt  
I'm gonna kick that bitch  
Straight up her.....*

At the end of Malitza's 'spot' Dave returns and Malitza immediately starts to play *On Mother Kelly's Doorstep* which Dave sings straight all the way to the final line of the song. He doesn't finish it but breaks off into patter:

*You know, as we were coming here this evening we saw that man outside the pub - selling hamburgers and hotdogs and I thought you poor fucker standing here on*

*a freezing night trying to get these silly bloody queens to swallow your sausages...  
Oh, I know you lot! Saving the swallowing for the Common later on!*

A member of the audience shouts something to Dave. He responds:

*I wouldn't try to speak with my mouth full if I was you... Oh, me?... I have my own  
hamburger which I'm keeping warm.*

He extracts one of his false breasts from his bodice the size, shape and colour of a hamburger and mimes munching it, hands it out to the audience, laughing:

*Do you want a bite? I've got another one... I didn't tell you the story of my bar  
mitzvah..*

Here he delivers a long and very animated narration of his bar mitzvah celebration, taking out the false breast which 'becomes' a Jewish cap. At various points it falls off. Dave bangs it back on his head. It slips down. He tries to balance it on his nose. He ends the section with:

*It's all true! Oh, by the way, I must tell you this. Some people get upset by my  
Jewish jokes but I've got to be serious now. I got a letter from someone telling me  
off for my Jewish jokes, saying that he's fed up with me talking about Jews and the  
Jewish gags. He'd lost relatives in the War. Well, I've got to say that I'm very sorry  
that you've lost your relatives and I've written to Helpline on your behalf.*

The audience greets this with ambivalent appreciation - some with loud laughter, others with sounds somewhere between jeers and titters. Dave himself appears to be genuinely shocked at his own words:

*You know I can't believe I've just said that!*

Malitza bellows with deep, loud laughter as Dave recovers through his own laughter and apologetic remarks and asks if there are any requests. A member from the audience shouts for *Sunset Boulevard*. This is the next song. The audience shout for *Hava' Nagilah* and Dave and Malitza go into a very highly energized version of the song encouraging the audience to sing along. The audience in front of the stage area dances along and claps to

the music. The entire atmosphere in the bar has changed to one that feels like a community celebration as Dave and Malitza end their evening's performance.

## **Interview Extracts**

### *Dave Lynn*

BB: Now, a lot of people have their characters, you know, like Lily Savage. They have a fictional character that is not them, as such. You are Dave Lynn. What are you performing? I mean, are you a fella in a frock or -?

DL: Yeah. Well, there is a character called Dave Lynn but I wanted that character to be as real as possible - a man dressed up in women's clothes - because that was the original funny side of dressing up. You didn't do it because you wanted to look like a woman. Well, I didn't. You did it because it would make people laugh. So, at that time, to have changed my name to a feminine title didn't occur to me. It didn't make sense. And there is a background to the character and I talk about it because the character is real.

BB: From your own life? I mean, you do a lot of Jewish stuff and you say, 'Well, I'm Jewish and etc.etc...'

DL: It's generally very true. I talk about my mother being a Jewish mother and the situations in which we have been in our lives and just recently, for instance, we were talking about it to the Press - our relationship so it's actually as funny as making up a biography. Also, I feel I would have to live a second life if I had another character.

BB: People like Jimmy Trollette and Lee Paris, Colin from D.R.A.G, Dressed Roughly As Girls, (when he works solo) and yourself keep your names but perform in drag. So why drag, then?

DL: Well, it depends. For me, I was no great shakes as a singer or an actor or a dancer or a comic and the drag kind of put that final moulding on it because I found it amusing to me in drag. It was a kind of cheeky feeling come over me and that cheeky feeling turned itself into a kind of humour. And so, you can excel at one thing but you can do everything with the drag. You are acting every night because it doesn't matter what mood you're in, you still have to go on and act. A cabaret act just 'happens'. And as Malitza and I always work 'ad lib', generally speaking, you have to put it on. So, there's an acting side to it. We sing and we chat. It's humorous. So it combines everything but with the added icing of the fact that we are both in drag. Drag should be funny. There are different sorts of drag. You've got the 'new wave drag' where they look incredibly good. But it's still with humour.

BB: For instance, your breast paddings - you take them out and use them as props. I've seen you use it as a Jewish hat, as a hamburger, as all sorts of things. Now, it doesn't seem to me that any person wanting to come across convincingly as a woman would do that kind of thing. I can't imagine Rupaul doing that or Danny La Rue. One night I saw a performance of yours at the Vauxhall and there was a guy with a hamburger stall just outside and he had a temporary franchise with the pub, I think, at the time, to sell these hamburgers and you kind of gave him a plug for his hamburgers by taking out your breasts and proceeding to make a hamburger out of them and eat them! That's the kind of clowning, fooling around which you seem to do more of than some other people that I see. Is that all intentional?

DL: Yeah. It's natural. It's what I feel. You see, the point of looking good is that you then take that good look and then do something silly with it! I'm speaking strictly from my own personal view of it. I don't think of myself as a woman or even as coming across as a woman when I'm up there. I think of myself as a glamorous drag artist. I can't take it too seriously because I'm not a woman. Those breasts are not real and there's no point in pretending that they are! And it's funny to pull out a 'falsie' and do something ridiculous with it. In Brighton I walk up and down the street and talk to people in sequin dresses. It's ridiculous! But that's the fun side of it. Sure some people may be misogynistic and mock women by putting on high pitched voices and exaggerated gestures and things but I don't. And it's the same in my performances. I don't do like the 'school for trannies' where fellas walk and stand and nuance like a woman is supposed to do because that's a lot of hooey.

.....

BB: Hinge and Brackett have actual characters. They are Perry and George Logan. They are not being Perry and George at all when they're performing Dame Hilda and Doctor Evadne. But in your performances there are parts of you and Michael very much in the background of the performances.

DL: Very much so.

BB: You say you 'ad lib' a lot. But it's not all 'ad lib'.

DL: No, no.

BB: So do you script quite a bit? How much do you script?

DL: Well, we have done and we used to when we first met but we found with working so regularly on the scene you have to work on the level of them. And sometimes the scripted stuff is wrong. You have to have the ability to change. Malitza's brilliant. She can change the music in the middle of any song. But I will change track through the show. So we never actually go, 'Well, we'll do this for the first quarter of an hour, this for the second quarter of an hour, this for the last quarter of an hour'. It never works like that. In our minds something has bonded and we kind of know where we're going. When I start something he knows that I'm leading to the time when I go off and change for example. So there's a kind of understanding.

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BB: Your little cameo impersonations - Shirley Bassey, Kylie, Cleo Laine etc. - where you're taking the piss out of all of them, especially the Karen Carpenter one which is just you indicating the microphone stand - some people would say that those are examples where drag artists exist in order to take the piss out of women public figures. It has also been said that drag is by its very nature misogynistic. What would your reply be to that?

DL: Oh, no, I wouldn't agree with that. I mean, what's the point in being dressed up as a woman taking off men? The thing is, you see, that how that came about was that one night in Central Station I was messing about in the middle of the act and I started asking the audience to shout out impersonations for me to do off the cuff, so to speak, and most of them shouted out women. Even the women shouted out women for me to do, like Bette Davis. It was all sort of spontaneous and natural, you see. It wasn't planned or anything like that. I have done Elvis - dead. I've had Jason Donovan screamed out and I've done him. If someone shouts out someone I've done before I'd just do something silly. Suppose someone shouts out Barbara Cartland for example - well, she wears a wig, doesn't she? So, I suppose I'd twiddle my wig around or something ridiculous like that. I don't have to do anyone, either. I sometimes say, 'You've had that!' and not actually do it. If I couldn't really do one - say I couldn't get the voice or something they get worked on over time. The ones you see are the ones that are most popular. They're not serious impersonations, they're fooling around.

BB: There is a viewpoint that says that any cabaret artist, comic, comedian of whatever kind, if they are being subversive in their entertainment then one of the things they need to do is to undercut all these areas of seriousness that people could be being precious about because it kind of releases a whole load of feelings and tensions that are swept under the carpet usually.

DL: Oh, yes, I do. I do Patsy Cline, for instance. I go crashing into the wall. Yes, it's obviously the way you do that. I know it's terrible. But I'm afraid of flying. And if this guy was to talk to me and tell me off about it, I would say, 'Every time I do that gag I think I could be on a 'plane the next day.' But that's not the point. I mean, she's not upset about it - now. So many people come up about that Patsy Cline gag and love it. I don't think I've ever had anybody say anything bad about it..

.....

BB: There's another question I wanted to touch on. I saw it one night when you were doing a residency at the Vauxhall Tavern. Maisie Trollette was a guest on the show. You were all using the words 'he' and 'she' as if they were substitutes for each other, as if it didn't matter. For instance, while you were all going in and out several roles very swiftly, you would narrate the story and come to the Fagin part and say 'he' and then Maisie would be doing the Fagin part and then the word would change to 'she'. I've seen you do the same kind of thing in audiences at the Two Brewers as well. You'd refer to some guy in the audience as 'he' and then

very shortly afterwards you would also use 'she' when you're talking about the same guy. You tend to use 'he' and 'she' as if they were interchangeable. Does that signify that to you in your performances gender is interchangeable?

DL: Yeah. I call most men 'she'. I don't, however, call lesbians or women 'he'.

BB: What's the underlying thing to that - calling men 'she' and 'he' as well.

DL: This is something about me. I call men 'she'. Even my father - I say, 'She's got the hump'. It's an inference on the word 'she' - it's the sound of the word 'she'. It came about I kept calling artists 'he' when I was working with people like Hinge and Brackett. It was very hard to say 'he'. I actually called Dr. Evadne 'George' once. It was very, very hard. And Malitza was the worst. He didn't want anyone to know. He was going to pretend to be a real woman. Everything had to become 'she'. In the Oliver thing you do get confused between the 'he' and the 'she' because Maisie or Malitza is a drag queen and 'she' is playing Fagin who is a 'he' but then men being referred to as 'she', yes, it gets confusing.

BB: I wonder if that confusion is really so much part of the act, your whole performance, that it's actually deliberate.

DL: I think a lot of it is. That humour has to come from within you. There are people who can teach themselves to be funny. There are other people who just have 'something' inside them. Maisie is one of these people. And so is Michael. It's very easy to be funny when you're surrounded by people who are naturally funny, who don't obviously try to be funny. People will quote Maisie because of the way she says things. She's naturally a funny human being. Malaichael (oops!) Malitza - he's like that. He'll say something that will crack me up. I've had to get used to him. He's got lovely little habits in the dressing room. If he's got nothing to say but doesn't want to be left out he'll sort of go 'Mm-mm-mm-mm-' (wiggling hands). I don't think he realizes he does that. And it's just the funniest thing and I look at him thinking, 'What's she up to?' On the other hand, if he's quiet I will know he's in a bad mood.

BB: You've done it now, you see? Talking about Michael you've said 'What's she up to' and then also 'he' will do something. It's this interchangeability of 'he' and 'she' that I'm referring to.

DL: 'She' is the lighthearted side. 'He' is usually the down side. It's the flamboyancy of the job. We are obviously camp. The confusion of 'he' and 'she' used at the same time almost about the same person is part of the campness, the clowning.

.....  
BB: .....Nowadays, you hear a lot about 'Queer performers' and 'Queer performances'. The word 'queer' being used as opposed to 'gay' or 'drag' or 'lesbian'.

DL: What, is it coming in again, to call it 'Queer'?

- BB: Yeah. How do you relate to that definition?
- DL: I think it's just another name. It's great actually. I think it's about time drag had a new title. I don't mind it being called 'Queer performance'. I think it's fine but I remember when people would say 'Oh, no, I'm a female impersonator!' and I'd say, 'Bollocks!'
- BB: Well, that's if you are actually impersonating a female.
- DL: Kate Robbins is a female impersonator. We're not. There's nothing wrong with the term 'drag artist'.
- BB: Is a drag artist 'gay', necessarily? He could be 'straight'.
- DL: You know we've been on 'Vanessa' - the programme? This very subject came up. And I said to this woman, 'Being gay, is none of your business. I hope you come and see my show and be entertained.' She said, 'I'm sure I would but if my son saw you, would he become gay?' I said, 'I don't think you're being a very bright mother,' I said, 'I'm not making love to someone on the stage and I could easily be straight. I have been. I've been married. I just decided I like the other side better.' But it would have made no difference. I still would have been a drag artist. I think it helps to be gay, though.
- BB: The thing about people using the term 'Queer' would be to cover gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people - every single kind of non-heterosexual type. Like an inclusive term.
- DL: 'Queer' still offends some people.
- BB: I mean, you could go into some 'gay' places and people would be offended because they would think you should not be dressed in drag.
- DL: Oh, yeah, definitely.
- BB: And some women, for instance, would think that drag is misogynistic and that just because the man is in a frock this is wrong. Whereas, the 'Queer' culture is supposed to be all embracing.
- DL: I do know that a lot of people are offended by drag. I know a lot of people at Pride were. I don't mind being called a Queer performer but I think the word 'queer' still offends. Perhaps, a new name should come up because with drag moving into the mainstream entertainment now the doors are open and I think the public are coming back - the straight public.

*Michael Topping (Malitza)*

- BB: So the personality of Countess Malitza - where did that character come from?
- M: Yes. It's part of me. There was no planning. I sort of have a history of her in my head, which is, actually, similar to Militza Korjus. I kind of married the two together. Militza Korjus was the daughter of a Countess, Russian-Polish. My base is common. So she's actually half-common, half-refined.
- BB: It's not as well defined a fictional background as say Dame Edna's or Lily Savage's, where they have built up husbands and mothers etc.
- M: Oh, no. I have all that somewhere in the back of my head and I could answer that if necessary but I never use it in the performances. I know what she's like. She's been dragged back on to the stage out of retirement, which is really what sort of happened to me. Sort of reluctantly being there. She's not really that fussed over being on stage. She enjoys being there but she's not ambitious and half the time she's thinking, 'I couldn't really be bothered'. Other people tell me things about it like, 'We watched you from the wings. David was talking to you and you were wiping the keyboard!' ... Or I'm just distracted fiddling in my handbag or something half there.
- BB: Your make-up. You've got Dave who's as glamorous as you can get sometimes and then you've got you - sort of aspiring to glamour but there's always that thing that's not quite there. That's part of the character, is it?
- M: No. That's me! It's part of that 'I couldn't really be bothered' thing and also I'm sloppy about make-up. I always do it at the last minute. It's not essential to me. I'm not vain, you know!
- BB: So there really is a blending. It's not like Hinge and Brackett, for instance, where there are completely different personas. You're not actually being 'Countess Malitza' who is completely different from you, like an actor might or like an impersonator might. You're not impersonating anyone.
- M: No. I'm being the middle-aged woman part of myself. And expressing that femininity which is inside me on stage. A lot of drag queens do the opposite. They seem to express their masculinity through the frock, through the drag. They tend to become very aggressive. I don't.
- BB: That's one thing I was intending to move on to - the view that drag is somehow the expression of the phallic nature of the male performer in female gear. The idea that once they're in a dress they can get as aggressive, as assertive, as rude and as antagonistic as they wish.
- M: They get away with it because of that's way Society seems to work.....

BB: Yes. And then, of course, you have the criticism that drag is misogynistic and woman-hating. Your drag and Dave's is of a different quality.

M: I like to think of it as being a gentle, kind sort of drag. I don't feel I'm sending women up. I wear what I feel a woman of my age and figure would wear. I'm just about to chuck so much of my wardrobe out, actually. I'm not parodying women. I'm expressing my femininity. I'm quite happy as a man. I don't have problems expressing masculinity therefore I don't have problems expressing femininity.

.....  
BB: Is there anything in your thought that when you're doing Malitza you are 'being' a woman? Or that you're performing as a woman? For instance, in the case of Dr. Evadne Hinge, there's is no question of it - what George is doing is 'being' this little old lady and you have to know George Logan well, to see any traces of George Logan in his performance of Dr. Hinge. I mean, I know a lady who actually thought Patrick and George were really these two ladies. Hinge and Brackett to her were not performed by men until I pointed it out to her and she took a lot of convincing. She had to see them about a dozen times before she woke up to the idea that they were guys.

M: That's a complete portrayal, isn't it? I'm not doing that. Yet, in a sense, I have a pretence of being a woman of that age. You know I'd pretend to be shocked at some of the rude bits and come out with words that I would not normally come out with. I react as, perhaps, my mother would. But I find that I do that a lot, anyway.

BB: But how much of that is just Michael?

M: Well, as I said, they interweave.

BB: But when the audience come in they know you're not portraying a woman in the same way as Patrick and George are.

M: At the beginning they thought I was. But it's only recently that I've found my style. You know, it's like finding yourself. And strangely enough these are the trousers I actually wear on stage. Because I've suddenly discovered women's trousers and I'm so happy! I think they are wonderful for daily wear. So I arrive wearing these women's trousers and put my make-up on.

BB: You find women's trousers more comfortable or what? I mean, you're wearing them now as Michael.

M: Yes.

BB: So you're not actually wearing women's clothes because you're deliberately cross-dressing as a woman?

M: In a funny sort of way I don't cross-dress at all. At least, I don't consider myself as cross-dressing. I mean, this top I'm wearing now could easily be something I may

throw on. Am I cross-dressing now? I don't think so. I'm merely wearing these clothes and they happen to be women's trousers...I'd put on the make-up and the wig, perhaps, for the show but I'm not really cross-dressing as such.

.....

BB: The jokes within your songs, you sort of do a lot of what I would call 'light blue' stuff, innuendos etc.

M: Yes, where a word rhymes, you mean, and I use a completely non-rhyming word which takes the place of the rude one which does rhyme? Yes, I do that a lot and, also, now I've started mouthing the word and letting the audience actually sing it aloud by themselves.

BB: Why do you do that?

M: I want the audience to think it. It came about by listening to Max Miller. He used to say, 'It was clean when it left me!' He believed that if you get the audience to do the thinking it was much better. It can be quite offensive if you say something yourself. Sometimes I love to be offensive but not always.

BB: There's a bit in a song that you do with Dave in which there's the line, 'I fucked him!' and Dave does this thing where he goes, 'I'm not going to say that. I'm not going to say that.' And then you bellow 'Fucked him!' Where does that kind of double-play come from? Did it just happen once and you kept it in or did you decide that's what you were going to do?

M: It just happened.

BB: You don't plan anything, then, on a daily basis?

M: No. We don't plan at all. We both work inspirationally or intuitively or whatever. We are constantly working on the moment things happen. Obviously, we repeat things but those things once happened intuitively at some previous moment and they worked and we did them again and they would have become part of our repertoire, if you like. So everything's got a history but - no, we don't plan any particular performance, no.

BB: And this way of working intuitively, spontaneously, in the moment, could be seen as a form of cabaret clowning.

M: Yes. You've sort of got your techniques and your material and you play it all as and when, in a free spirit, really. If you find a thing works you keep it in. With the audiences sometimes we do things where they can become involved without having to use any intellect. If they are drinking, or half-drunk or drugged, you need to give to those who are listening but also not overload on the others. Dave has a remarkable gift for that kind of chatter. He has a gift of being himself with the chat. He talks to them as if he's known them all forever. He shares things with them.

.....

- BB: Coming to your stories or long jokes about cottaging and sexual things like that, when you tell them...
- M: I don't tell them actually.
- BB: Oh, but you've done that once or twice.
- M: Have I?
- BB: When I've seen you do a show on your own.
- M: Oh, you've actually watched me on my own?
- BB: Yes. When Dave hasn't been around, when Dave has got the car stuck somewhere or for some reason he hasn't been there and we've had Malitza on your own and you have on those occasions done jokes and things. Not an awful lot but you have. But the point I'm getting round to make is that some of your stories and songs as well, for that matter, the sexual jokes within them, they can be interpreted by the audience as being told by Malitza, a middle-aged looking woman with a bit of coyness and some bravado, or they can be interpreted as being told by a gay man, whom we all know is performing as Malitza. Is this apparent ambiguity intentional? Or is it just whatever the audience would like to make of it?
- M: It's almost like everything I say has no sexual overtones, there's no sex vibe in what I do.
- BB: The sex vibe may not be there but certainly the images are...
- M: Oh, yes, but it's almost like a description rather than an experience.
- BB: For instance in one of your songs which you sing to the tune of 'Poor Wandering One', the line 'I came in a taxi tonight!' doesn't merely refer to you arriving in a taxi, surely? The sexual reference is clear, isn't it?
- M: Ah, you see! Max Miller. It was clean when it left me! I really say things that I think are funny. I think sex is very funny. I think the whole idea of cottaging is funny. I've seen orgies and they've reminded me of when I was in school and little children played with each other. I mean, when people say it's disgusting, I just think it's hysterical!
- BB: Well, that all does serve then to undermine or parody the whole serious intensity of sex which we sometimes find exists in the world.
- M: I suppose it's the guilt. I'm actually laughing at the guilt about it. And society's guilt about sex and sexuality.

### **C. LIZZIE DRIP**

His real name is Sean and he is based in Manchester. His performances revolve around the caricaturing of various established performers and media personalities, most of whom are female - notably Barbara Woodhouse, Freddie Mercury, Cher, Carmen Miranda, Tina Turner, Judy Garland and Madonna. His work incorporates songs, the use of puppets and elaborate costumes which are in themselves mechanical structures which expand and develop into grotesque extensions of various parts of his body.

#### **The Venue: Duke's Bar, Kennington Lane, South London**

The Duke's bar is a gay bar mainly for men. It is a very long space with a long circular bar that runs almost straight down the middle of the space. Along the two walls on either side some tables and chairs are placed on raised areas for customers to sit at. These areas are separated from the main floor by wooden railings. The stage area is placed at the entrance end of the bar. It is small and somewhat rudimentary. There is no wing space, no curtain and a series of small steps leading up to it from the dance floor which is immediately in front of it. Along the stage left wall is the music-kiosk where the d-js sit. At the end of the bar furthest from the performance area are the snooker table, cigarette machines, toilets and exit out to the beer garden at the rear of the building. The performers' changing rooms are also at this far end. It is a long walk for the performers to reach the stage from the changing rooms. It does, however, allow for interactions with the audiences before the actual stage performance starts. There is a small space on the side of the stage which is curtained off for those performers who need to make quick costume changes. The audiences are constantly moving, sometimes to play snooker, to visit the toilets, to go into the garden, to buy drinks. As the stage is next to the entrance, people are constantly

coming in off the street, paying their entrance money, and talking right next to the performer. This also allows for interaction with people who have newly arrived and who may or may not wish to see the performance but who have to cross in front of the performance space to get to the bar. The potential here for welcome or unwelcome interactive participation is enormous. There are a few lights directed on to the stage from the lighting rig on the ceiling but the venue relies on general lighting spilling over from the dance floor in front of the stage.

### **The Performance (May 1997)**

There are some commonalities between Lizzie Drip and Titti La Camp (Performance A). As with Titti La Camp, Lizzie's highly energetic performances include no words (apart from the introductory banter). She presents a series of short performances of exaggerated versions of singers and performers from a variety of musical *genres*.

At the start of the show Lizzie enters from the rear end of the bar, walks all the way down the length of the bar to the stage area to the music of Dolly Parton's song *Nine to Five*. She is dressed in a pink cow-girl suit which clings to her body. The breast areas of the costume end in mouths - bright red lips surrounding shining teeth - which have been sewn on to the bodice. As the song ends, the music goes straight into Parton's version of the song *Joshua*. The music has a swing beat to it which Lizzie uses to full effect by gyrating her breasts and hips, allowing the mouths to flop from side to side. The mouths suddenly open and snap the air in front of her. Bright red tongues spring out of them and snap back into the mouths. It is then that one can see that her visible arms with the hands stuffed into the costume pockets are false and Lizzie is manipulating a gadget inside the costume to

animate the mouths. The swinging beat of the song gathers momentum and Parton's volume increases. At this moment, the bouncing mouths, with their snapping teeth and lolling tongues, heave upwards and outwards. Lizzie's entire bosom lurches into the air and swings madly outwards to the left and then to the right. The mouths suddenly contract again. Each expansion and contraction takes them further and further upwards and outwards till her entire bosom seems to have a life of its own - the breasts flaying up and down with the teeth chattering and the tongues lolling about madly. The effect is a mixture of the surreal, the manic and the gross as Lizzie's bosom heaves itself forwards and she lets her body follow it. It reaches a climax as the music ends and Lizzie runs off the stage.

After a short pause the music turns to bird-song and Lizzie re-appears as a caricature of Judy Garland's portrayal of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. She is dressed in a little girl's blue gingham dress and wears a wig made of knitting-wool fashioned into two thick plaits with tied with large bright ribbons. On one of her arms she carries a basket which contains a dog puppet covered with a little blanket. Once she is on the stage we hear the soundtrack of *The Wizard of Oz*. We hear Judy Garland as Dorothy saying:

*We must be over the rainbow!.... Are you a good witch or a bad witch?*

And another voice saying:

*I'm not a witch at all*

though we are not at all sure who this voice belongs to. The tape plays Garland singing *Somewhere over the Rainbow*. Dorothy starts to get 'finger' food snacks out of the basket and nibble. Gradually the dog puppet starts to be animated. It looks around. Bird-song overlaps the singing. Dorothy feeds the dog. The dog appears for more. Dorothy pets the dog and feeds the dog some more. The dog suddenly shoots out of the basket in one

galvanized leap and lands on Dorothy's breast. The dog tries to suckle on her breast and Dorothy gets entangled trying to extricate him. She forces him into the basket and stuffs him in. This is repeated about three times. Each time the dog leaps on to a different part of Dorothy's body - the breasts, the arm-pits and the crotch. Each time he is pacified by being given a biscuit. As Dorothy nibbles on a biscuit herself, the dog gradually arches his body upwards into the air and urinates in a long, high jet over the audience. Dorothy is very apologetic and mimes that she's sorry. The dog is stuffed back into the basket only to re-emerge and expose his genital area to the audience and urinate in an even larger and higher jet-stream further out into the audience. Dorothy swings her body round in an mock attempt to stop the dog and the jet-stream of urine is shot over a number of people who have just entered and are standing paying their money at the check-in desk. In her feigned embarrassment and confusion Dorothy offers the audience what looks like a biscuit but as she is about to hand it over she mimes smelling a bad smell. She unclasps her hand to reveal what looks like dog excrement. She pulls a face of mock horror and examines the excrement closely, flicks her tongue over it, gives us a look somewhere between pleasure and shame-facedness, recovers and flings the excrement into the audience. The audience surge away from it, bumping into each other. There is moment of ambivalence when the men at the door appear to have taken offence but when Dorothy beams a smile at them and hands them a biscuit they seem to be somewhat pacified. But again, it is not a biscuit but 'dog excrement'. As the music comes to its final bars, Dorothy mimes her extreme annoyance at the dog, slaps it, shoves it into the basket, bashes it down with her fist and exits, beaming at the audience.

Lizzie's third appearance is as Carmen Miranda, dressed in a large colourful flamenco

dress with a hat covered with fake fruits. She dances her way on to the stage to the classic song *I-I-I-I-I love you very much* and continues down the stage and dances among the audience, shaking their hands and embracing them. She returns to the stage and sticks her hand down her blouse and adjusts her 'breasts' in the very 'butch' manner of 'straight' actors playing the Ugly Sisters or the Dame in Pantomime. She extracts a banana from her bosom, peels it quickly and wolfs it down in the stereotypical masculine manner of a 'navvy'. She throws the peel among the audience and belches loudly. She then returns to dancing among the audience, grabs a volunteer from the crowd and marches him on to the stage. She then extracts a second banana from her other breast, peels it, wolfs half of it down and places the other half upside down on the volunteer's head with its peel hanging down over his eyes. She then picks it up and smashes it into his face in very much the manner of slap-stick clowning. She mimes a belly laugh and takes out a third banana, this time from her hat. She peels it and grabbing hold of the volunteer she pushes the banana into his mouth and bangs it in. The volunteer is coughing up and choking on the stage floor. She beams and lifts him up, slaps him on the back and bits of banana fly out of his mouth into the audience. She then lifts up her skirt, delves into a voluminous pair of knickers and extracts a fourth banana; she smells it and pulls faces alternately of disgust, perverse pleasure and sheer sadistic glee as she focuses on the volunteer. She pushes him down to his knees on the stage floor, peels the banana rapidly, lifts her skirt, places the banana in her crotch to simulate a penis, pushes the volunteer's head on to the banana and 'bangs' it backwards and forwards as the music reaches the final line:

*And when I fall you know I fall for you!*

At the end of the music she picks the volunteer off the floor, pulls a towel out of her skirt, wipes him down, embracing him, calls for the audience to give him a round of applause,

throws the towel over his face so that he can wipe himself down as she runs off stage.

When she next appears Lizzie is dressed in a long floor-length bright red dress. The area around the hips and below has been built up so that the effect is of a narrow waist and a very large, bulbous bottom. She wears a long black wig and when she smiles her lips part to reveal a set of enormously large false teeth. The effect is that of the smiling teeth and mouth together being the same size as the rest of the entire head. As she enters, the tape plays *Ain't No Mountain High Enough* by Diana Ross and The Supremes. The performance continues gently with Diana Ross smiling and swaying to the music until a look of boredom comes across her face and she very suddenly takes out the set of giant false teeth and starts to scratch herself with them. The teeth snap like maracas and for a brief moment they turn into maracas, then into a hair comb and back into a body scratcher with Diana scratching her crotch in a crudely suggestive manner before popping them into her mouth and grinning her somewhat horrific, freakish grin. The music changes to *Reach Out and Touch* and for a while nothing seems to be happening. Then one notices an almost imperceptible movement in the arms as they start to lengthen. They are false arms made of wood. It is only then that one fully sees the giant false hands as they come out from behind her back where they have been placed all this time. Diana starts to hold her arms out to the audience as they continue to extend. When they reach the floor of the stage she lifts them and starts to whirl around on the spot. The music increases in volume as Diana whirls, stretching her arms, which have extended by about three feet towards the lights in the ceiling. They continue to stretch until they reach about four to five feet in length. She gestures with them as if to embrace the entire audience, drawing them in towards the stage. She continues to swirl, making the audience in front of the stage move away and cower.

The effect is of people ducking to avoid low-flying objects. By the closing bars of the song, the arms have extended to their fullest, Diana has thrown her head back and all we can see is the grinning, somewhat ghoulish gigantic smile of the false teeth and the extended wooden arms, about ten feet from end to end, on a body that now seems relatively small and swirling rapidly on one spot on the stage. At the end of the song, Lizzie takes a quick bow, draws her arms in and clatters off the stage to massive applause.

The music changes to Scott McKenzies's 1967 classic song *San Francisco* and Lizzie's next appearance is unmistakably Cher dressed as a hippie smoking on an enormous 'joint'. A large piece of white cloth is draped over one hand and looks as if it is concealing an object. Cher takes long, slow 'drags' on the 'joint', half offering it to the audience in a teasing sort of way. She then slowly removes the drapery to reveal the shrouded object - an urn. When the lid of the urn is open and shut again, the inside is seen to be pink and red with the shape and movement of lips opening and closing. The music changes to Sonny and Cher's *I Got You Babe* and Cher opens the urn slowly. It contains white powder representing the ashes of Sonny Bono, Cher's husband who met his death in a skiing accident. When the song reaches the lines:

*I got you to kiss goodnight,  
I got you to hold me tight*

she embraces the urn and kisses it in a mockingly affectionate manner. She sticks her fingers in the 'ashes' and sniffs them. The music at once alters to the faster beat 'dub' version of the song made by UB40 and she dances around with the small urn in her hand. She sniffs some more and then some more. The song returns to the original version and, as it reaches the extended chords on the final line, she sniffs the entire contents of the urn.

Her face is now completely covered in powder and she shakes her head and body as if in ecstasy as the UB40s 'dub' version returns and she flings the urn into the air. The effect here is like a snowfall as she exits off stage.

This is the end of the main performance but the audience expects an *encore* and Lizzie Drip, as usual, has prepared for this. The number of gadgets, costumes and music necessary for her performance make it impossible to perform a spontaneous *encore*. The *encore* opens with the music of *Barcelona* by Queen and Lizzie appears wearing a long voluminous black gown, a large dark wig and an enormous built-up body with a gigantic bust. Overlaying the music can be heard the taped sounds of tumultuous applause and shouts of 'Bravo!' 'Bravo!' as Lizzie's Montserrat Caballé takes her bow, tottering under her own weight. As the taped applause and cheers slowly die down, rich operatic chords are heard and Montserrat positions herself to sing. She breathes, closes her eyes, opens her mouth and the music stops abruptly. She sticks her tongue out to the audience and her gigantic bust opens as a small puppet the size of a glove puppet pops out like a Jack-in-the-Box. It is the head of Freddie Mercury. The audience bursts into spontaneous applause and, as if mirroring the taped audience at the opera, shout 'Bravo! Bravo!' The music of Queen's *Let the Songs Begin* starts up and Lizzie, from somewhere within her voluminous gown, manipulates the puppet-head Freddie Mercury to mouth the words as the taped voice of the real Freddie Mercury sings the song and Lizzie's Montserrat Caballé looks on, stroking the puppet-head affectionately. The effect is startling. As the song reaches its conclusion, the animated puppet-head Freddie Mercury begins to behave similarly to Dorothy's dog earlier in the show - it dives down into the constructed bosom sucking at Caballé's breasts and ends the song bobbing up and down in the area of the crotch.

#### **D. ROBERT O'NEILL CROSSMAN, MOTHER LUBRICIOUS OF THE SISTERS OF PERPETUAL INDULGENCE**

Though not considered a performer in any professional sense, Robert O'Neill Crossman has been included as representative of the performances and public ceremonies of The Sisters of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence (Plate 1). The Order, which emerged in the 1970s in Iowa, USA and has since established itself globally, consists mainly of 'gay male nuns', although there are some female 'brothers' and 'sisters' as well. The performances of members of the Order vary from individuals going out on the streets in their habits, when they are said to be 'manifesting in their nunsonas', to political demonstrations on public order changes (such as those against the Criminal Justice Act called by Queer political activist organizations like Outrage), Gay and Lesbian Pride parades, street parties and ritual ceremonies such as the Canonizations of Saints of the Order and Queer Joining Ceremonies. Referring to the established church as the Vulgar Church, the performed ceremonies are conducted largely in Polari (gay slang) by celebrant male nuns/sisters with 'nunsona' names such as Mother Ophelia Balls, Sister Virgin on the Ridiculous, Sister Madonna of the Edible Orifice, Sister Mystic Smeg of the Fortune-Telling Penis and Crystal Ball and Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look.

#### **The Manifesto of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence.**

The Promulgation of Universal Joy is a mission that the Order tries to carry out personally and collectively as an antidote to the oppressive effects of gender roles and behaviour forced upon women and men in our society. The Order tries to exorcise the gloom of conformity and 'proper' behaviour from our own lives and the lives of others.

Habitual Manifestation means that our members show forth their vocation whenever people gather, but most of all in the market place. The most direct means by which the Order expresses this public ministry is by the wearing of the Habit and the perpetration of their presence wherever and whenever possible.

Perpetual Indulgence is both a name and a way of life. The christian church has granted and still grants indulgences to its members, freeing them from the temporal punishment of sin. The Order of Perpetual Indulgence, in a similar way, desires by thought word and deed to do the same. The Order claims, for gay people, a perpetual indulgence from self-punishment, guilt and despair. (The OPI Manifesto. 1998)

### **The Joining Ceremony of EH and FA (October 1995)**

**Sister Celebrant: Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look aka Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye (Robert O'Neill Crossman)**

**The Venue: The Streets, Covent Garden, London**

On the pavement outside an art gallery/ cafeteria in Covent Garden the guests invited to the ceremony are assembling, bringing their drinks outside the cafeteria, talking to the two grooms, who are mingling with their respective family members and friends. It is a mixed crowd of men and women, some children and, scattered here and there among the invited guests, are a handful of male and female nuns and monks of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence. Part of the evening consists of an exhibition of collages with homoerotic subjects created by EH, one of the grooms. These are hung on the walls of the gallery/bar and a number of guests wander around looking at them. There is a buzz of anticipation and as the time draws near for the Ceremony to commence, the groom's close friends usher everybody out on to the street. The crowd spills over the pavement and across the street. The Ceremony begins.

### **The Ceremonial Performance**

There is a small procession of the Sister Celebrant and a number of male nuns, one female nun and one monk, followed by the two grooms. They start their procession from inside

the gallery/bar and make their way around the sides. One of the nuns is sounding a small set of cymbals. The monk is waving a censer. The incense wafts all over the small entrance as they make their way on to the pavement outside. As they process the crowd of invited guests draws back and spreads further over the street to give the celebrants and the entourage sufficient space to assemble for the Ceremony. Photographers run around with cameras. The cymbals, incense, assembled crowd of guests, nuns and monk begin to attract the attention of passers-by who are encouraged by the celebrant nuns to join the ceremony and watch. It is fast turning into a spectacle of street/ carnival theatre. There are now three main groups of people along the street - the celebrant nuns and monks together with the grooms, the invited guests and family friends, the men and women who happened to be in the gallery/bar who have joined the 'congregation' and the passers-by, shoppers, tourists etc. who have gathered across the street. The photographers have been joined by some of the passing tourists in their quest for pictures of what is beginning to appear less of a private ceremony and more of a piece of public street performance. The Sister Celebrant - Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look aka Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye (Robert O'Neill Crossman) begins the Proclamation. The order of the evening has been scripted by Mother Lubricious and contains some phrases of *polari*, gay 'slang':

**Sister Celebrant:** Bona to Varda You! (trans: *Good to see you!*)

**Gathered Faithful (the audience and the grooms):**

To Varda You, Bona!

**Sister Celebrant:** Be it known to all the Gathered Faithful here present, Mother Molesta, Sisters, Acolytes, Friends for the Day, Slaves, Catamites and terrifically interested parties, that the Order of Perpetual Indulgence is about to conduct its soon-to-be-famous JOINING CEREMONY. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are an order of gay male nuns, dedicated to the Promulgation of Universal Joy and

the Expiation of Stigmatic Guilt. We are a worldwide sadomystic cult and self-catering organisation, except when we're at the bar, which is when our vow of poverty is most useful. We perform services to the community both by hand and by mouth and in every conceivable position.

By the power vested in me by my birthright as an out and proud gay man of one of the seven genders, I call down Almighty Queer Power which was created by us and for us, for our own liberation, to be amongst us as we celebrate tonight the joining of two fantabulosa and fragrant omipalones (trans: *homosexuals*). Queer people can't wait for the election of a nice Government so that we can be given freedom. Long ago we realised that we get what we want when we take liberties. It is enough for us that we recognise the joy and excitement which is released when dykes and queers decide to let go of Stigmatic Guilt, and as a community we rejoice in the energy of queer solidarity, whether between couples, between generations, between social classes or between differing cultures. We won't wait for our relationships to be institutionalised by a liberal state; there just isn't time to do it before breakfasts on most days!

These two met Mother Dotty of the Divine Tongue at Manchester Mardi Gras, and he has begged and pleaded with me (I love a good supplicant) to conduct this ceremony, and it is my humble privilege and duty so to do (I don't get out much, and it's dire staring at the four walls of the convent all the time, let's face it!).

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are happy to assist these men to publicly declare their delight in charver (trans: *sex*) the shocking shudder of coincidental spattering, and the ultimate and long-anticipated Victory to Cum. We share their pride in love and commitment, without fear, without shame or guilt or blame. May I quote from Che Guevara:

*Dejeme decirle, a riesgo de parecer ridiculo, che el revolucionario verdadero es guiado por grandes sentimientos de amor!*

Or,

*Let me say, at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love!.*

So, without further ado, on with the adhesion!

**Sister Celebrant** addresses the grooms:

EH, why do you want to be joined to FA?

EH gives his reply.

**Sister Celebrant:** FA, why do you want to be joined to EH?

FA gives his reply.

**Sister Celebrant:** For how long do you wish to be joined? A night, a weekend, a month, a year, a lifetime, or until you're fed up with each other?

EH responds. FA responds.

**Sister Celebrant:** Glad we got that sorted out. That is indeed a solemn and serious undertaking, and it smacks of good old-fashioned honesty! What vows are you prepared to make today before these witnesses (they don't have to be mutual vows)?

EH responds. FA responds.

**Sister Celebrant:** Are you willing to commit your whole self, body and soul, to the furtherance of your partner's perpetual pleasure and sheer indulgence?

EH responds. FA responds.

**Sister Celebrant:** Are you willing at all times to communicate your needs and desires, wishes and expectations for so long as you both shall be joined?

EH responds. FA responds.

**Sister Celebrant:** I'll ask for diagrams later. Do you promise not to bitch about the other behind their back, unless they have completely pissed you off, and they deserve it anyway?

EH responds. FA responds.

**Sister Celebrant:** Do you have tokens of esteem to exchange?

EH and FA exchange gifts.

**Sister Celebrant:** If anyone has just and serious reason (or if you have heard a good rumour) why these people cannot be joined, then speak now. Right, that's it! E and F, you have made a declaration before these people here present (and you can be sure that they will dish you every time they see you talking to someone else). You have exchanged vows declaring your intentions towards each other, and lavished expensive and practical gifts on one another.

By the Almighty Queer Power invested in me as a Mother Inferior of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence, and in the name of all our

Queer Saints and Beati, I now pronounce you joined! To seal this relationship, you may kiss the Sister Celebrant, and then you may kiss each other! Members of the Gathered Faithful are asked to consensually hug and kiss each other in celebration of this Queer Union!

There is great applause and cheering. The Sister Celebrant, nuns and monk form a ceremonial order and process along the pavement until they reach the steps at the doorway to the gallery/bar. The Sister Celebrant stops, turns, opens a bottle of Guinness or stout with a bottle opener which has been dangling from his belt, sprays the couple and the crowd with it before quaffing it as they disappear into the gallery/bar. The audience cheer, confetti - small pink triangles - is thrown and the crowd disperse into the gallery/bar or into the neighbouring streets.

### **Interview Extracts**

BB: So what's it all about the work of the Sisters? It looks very anarchic, a send-up and a piss-take and yet there also seems to be dead seriousness behind it.

ML: Well, the seriousness behind it is that if we don't wise up about HIV more people are going to die. I mean, basically, the Sisters are there because - the reason I joined the Sisters - was so that people get a chance to talk about Sex and Relationships and Safer Sex. And the reason we wear the Pre-Vatican Two habit is that people recognize those as nun's habit and people find it easier to talk to a nun. Very rarely do you get abused or attacked. You lose ego when you're in the habit - when you're in 'nunsona' - and people just come up and talk to you. So, that happens - like, going amongst the Gathered Faithful -

BB: Who are the 'Gathered Faithful'?

ML: Anybody who isn't a nun.

BB: Any one at all? Anyone on the street?

ML: Yeah.

BB: So it doesn't have to be people who are gay or lesbian.

ML: No. Gosh, no. It's anybody at all. I've had some of my best conversations with people who don't identify as gay. I once had a brilliant conversation with a Franciscan nun who was wearing a new habit on a plane from Auckland to Los Angeles. So you don't have to identify as being lesbian or gay at all to be part of the Gathered Faithful.

BB: So when you get in your nun persona it's for particular events and functions?

ML: Or you just go out in your habit.

BB: Like a tranny would get up in drag and go down the street.

ML: Well, no, a tranny is going out in drag. I'm just putting my habit on because I am a nun. I'm not a pretend nun. I am a nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest.

BB: And the fact that you are a 'male nun'. A 'nun' is generally female. So how does this work? You say you're not in drag and yet you are a man and you are a nun and nuns are usually women.

ML: They usually are - yes. We've actually got female Sisters as well. They tend to call themselves Brothers. I think, originally when it first began in America, there was a tendency to ridicule the Catholic Church, the established Church. That's not what we do. We just use the perhaps sub-Bowdlerized version of some of the Church ceremonies but it's not intended to ridicule them or anything like that. People recognize the Form, right? And so can understand, partly, what we're on about. Some of the Sisters do actually go in for some kind of pastiche of Catholic Masses

.....

BB: So when you go out as Mother Lubricious, not on an 'event' but just as yourself are you doing a performance, do you think?

ML: Well, I am in a sense because I lose being 'Robert' and I become Mother Lubricious or Sister Kiss My Arse Goodbye, which was my previous name, and people recognize me.

BB: What was that?

ML: Sister Kiss My Arse Goodbye. I had to have a colostomy bag. I thought it was a good idea to recognize it in nunsona. I think some people think I'm performing and those are the people who challenge and get a bit negative and start having a go. One of my worst experiences was after the Gay Pride celebration last year. I went to get a cab late at night at a place near where the Pride Festival had been and a man who was quite drunk had a go at me. He said I was taking the piss out of the Catholic Church and all the rest of it and, of course, I stayed in nunsona and I didn't respond in the way he wanted me to. I dealt with it in the way a nun would. I just listened

and said things like, 'Oh, really. That's very interesting. Where did you get that idea from?' He gradually calmed down eventually.

BB: So how do you respond to that? I mean, there you are, 'Robert' - albeit in your nun persona talking to this man. He related to you as if you were somebody taking the piss and you spoke to him as 'Mother Lubricious'. So how would you see his response - like a member of an audience who was heckling?

ML: Almost, almost. He wanted to wind me up and he was going on about, 'You're taking the piss' and I said, 'No, I'm not. The reason I'm dressed like this is because I am a nun and people find it easy to talk to me about sex and relationships and things'. But he really wasn't with it. His listening skills were not of the highest order. What was interesting was that the other people in the cab office became like a supportive audience and started to sort of defend me though I don't think they completely understood'

.....

BB: Right, so what is the structure? Is there a structure to the Sisters?

ML: We're a democratic organization. Just because somebody's called a 'Mother' doesn't mean that they're in charge. In fact, they're called 'Mother Inferior'.

BB: So there's an inversion of things -

ML: Yeah. 'Course it is. Because, I suppose, in that sense it is about attacking the established order. Mothers are there because they've been nuns a while and know the ropes and usually are fairly well organized.

BB: So what is the basic order of things?

ML: Well, I'm a Mother of the Canterbury House. We have conclave twice a year. We all meet in habit. And usually there's someone who wants to profess or someone who wants to become a novice. So we have a ceremony when they clothed in each piece of their habit. And there is a form of words for that. They adopt their nun names. So that is a kind of straight lift, I suppose, from the established Church. And then we have 'nuncions' about once a month when we meet together.

BB: It's a social occasion?

ML: Yeah, but we also do business. Those are nuncions as opposed to functions.

BB: What kind of business?

ML: We have a list of the various events we may be taking part in during the next period. We agree canonizations. We accept nominations and sponsorships for new novices. You have to be a novice for a year and a day before you can profess.

- BB: What do you have to do during that year and a day?
- ML: You have to manifest at least three times in habit. It's called 'Cracking the Habit'. And you'll be looked after by the Novice Mistress. So if you're uneasy about anything you go to the Novice Mistress. And there's usually some other nun who will mentor you and this usually results in nuncest which is the coming together of two or more Sisters.
- BB: And it works exactly the same for the female nuns?
- ML: Yeah. When any female members become Sisters they identify as Gay Male Nuns.
- BB: This is where I find it interesting - where the biological gender isn't necessarily functioning as the focus point of identity, in the same way as people might expect. So it isn't really cross-dressing that goes on. It's a kind of pastiche of cross-dressing itself, in a sense. Like in the straight world the kind of thing Danny La Rue would do in that he would be seen as becoming a Dame like in the pantomimes. That is not what's going on with the Sisters.
- ML: No, you're right. It isn't. It's like a persona that you take. You actually lose the ego, in a sense.
- BB: Is it a bit like what Charles Ludlam from the Ridiculous Theatre Co. in the States would have said, 'I'm not getting up in drag, I'm actually portraying Camille throughout the performance. Therefore, I am Charles Ludlam but I am also Camille.' But whereas Ludlam was concerned with the performance aspect in its theatrical sense it seems to me that the Sisters go beyond that or under that in some way.
- ML: Yeah, yeah. We're challenging ego, really. We're saying, 'We have a function'. And our function is to spread Universal Joy and Expiate Stigmatic Guilt. So, for instance, if we meet someone who puts themselves down for being gay or whatever we have an answer for them for why they're doing it.
- BB: I suppose one might ask the question why nuns? Why Mother Whoever? Why not Father or Brother?
- ML: Because of the thing about masculine and feminine and the undermining of it all. Nuns are very powerful women, you know. And also, the thing about people being prepared to disclose or talk to a nun differently about all sorts of things rather than to me as Robert or you, perhaps. And also, the thing about the nun's costume being recognizable by most people as being nothing else but a nun's habit. There's no getting away from that. And also it symbolized for some people a system of oppression for centuries  
 .....
- ML: Yeah. We're turning it into something joyful.

- BB: Whereas trainers and T-shirts and 501s don't necessarily symbolize that?
- ML: Well, they certainly symbolize a kind of safety. Mind you, you've got to be under twenty-five and thin.! Where's my poster. I must show you this. I'm really proud of this! I was the subject of a poster for World Aids Day. You see? And it's making a point, isn't it? I'm cultivating a halo! Some of us are holier than thou! And somebody said to me that it's been absolutely devastating seeing that put around as a poster for them.
- BB: Why?
- ML: Well, 'cause it's a picture of a nun, right? And it's a nun with a bit of a wink in her eye! Rather like the nun from Hell.
- BB: Now, supposing somebody said to you, 'Come on, it's all just a gas. You just want to dress up as a nun because you're working through things about yourself.'
- ML: Could be.
- BB: 'And all the other stuff is just sort of justifying it in some way.'
- ML: Well, could be. I don't know. Well, the point is that whilst I'm doing this people are having a joyful experience. We're spreading the message that being queer is nothing to be ashamed of, there's no guilt associated with Sex as far as we're concerned and you don't blame somebody else for your situation. You take responsibility for yourself. Now if people learn something about that whilst I'm out there in my habit having a good time, so what if I am working off something personally. Does it matter? I probably reach a lot more people than people who are serious about everything.
- BB: There also seems to be - to be a bit jargonistic - a kind of Dionysian- Bacchanalian aspect to it all which links it with carnival, topsy-turvydom, medieval foolery - that kind of thing.
- ML: Holy Fools! Yes, you could call the Sisters Holy theatre, if you like. Because that also had a serious point to make. Like Medieval Feast of Fools and Mystery Plays etc, which everybody went to see. I did that once in the Cotswolds one summer. And people wanted to talk seriously about the issues in those plays.

## **E. THE DIVINE FEUD: CATHY PEACE AND CHRIS GREEN**

Cathy Peace and Chris Green have had separate performance careers for the last ten years but I have only included the work they have done together as 'The Divine Feud', which

was also the name of the show from which the material has been taken. They incorporate drag, songs, scripted skits, improvized dialogue and audience participation games. Peace and Green are a lesbian and a gay male performer who refer to themselves as Queer performers because they see the essence of the term 'Queer' encompasses what they do. *The Divine Feud* is a show in which there is a searching for a sense of Queerness in order to reinvent ways of relating between gay men, lesbians, transgendered people etc. that is different from relating to the stereotypes of these groups.

**The Venue: Duckie Club at The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Vauxhall, South London**

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Vauxhall, South London is a gay pub traditionally known for gay cabaret entertainment, especially drag performances. There is only one area containing a stage for performances and a bar running along an adjacent wall. Along the wall opposite the stage there is a raised area for audience which is marked off from the rest of the space by railings, rather like a gallery/balcony. On either side of the stage are the doors leading to the toilets. Stage right of the stage, in view of the audience, is a small stairway leading up to the very small dressing room whose door gives immediately on to the stage. There is no wing space on the stage. The entire stage is visible from the audience when the curtains are open. Along the extreme stage right wall of the bar is the music-kiosk for the resident d-js of the night. The audience is constantly shifting depending on whether people wish to watch the show or move to the bar. Some of the audience are seated at tables along the galleried section of the bar but many are standing in front of the performance stage and at the bar itself. The stage and the audience areas are lit by a number of lights focused on to them from the ceiling of the audience area.

### **Duckie Club Night at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern**

Duckie runs one night a week at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. It is billed as a place for ‘boyzie-girls’ and ‘girlzie boyz’. Simon Casson and Amy Lamé, who run and host the bar, encourage the audience to play around with images. They advertize a theme for each night some which were directly inviting people to play around with fantasies and images: ‘Come dressed as a gay woman dressed as a man’ or ‘Come dressed as your favourite work of art’ or ‘Come as a prostitute’. On Duckie nights, the bar remains the same as for other Royal Vauxhall Tavern nights but decorations appropriate to the theme night are hung from the ceiling. The gender ascriptions of the toilets are not observed and encouragement is given to use the toilet areas themselves as expressive, interactive spaces. Large sheets of paper are hung along the walls of the toilets with pens attached to strings. Audience members are invited to write or scribble graffiti appropriate to the theme night such as: ‘LIST TEN WORKS OF ART THAT ARE ABSOLUTE SHITE’, ‘TEN REASONS WHY DAVID BOWIE SUCKS’ or ‘YOUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE QUEERS’. Sometimes these writings and/or scribbles inform the current night’s performance. At times the toilets themselves are used for some aspects of the night’s performance. On a night when Amy Lamé herself was in the USA, a telephone line was set up in one of the toilets and she hosted the night ‘long distance’. In this way, the toilet areas become performance spaces for audience participation and galleries in themselves. Performers and artists due to perform during the night tend to mingle with the audience in the bar and withdraw to the dressing room area immediately prior to their ‘turns’.

### **The Performance: ‘The Divine Feud’ (April 1996)**

The show is a cabaret presentation of the entire history of human society, fronted by two

characters in identical traditional show-girl outfits (boas, feathers, and all) both of whom are called 'Julie' (Plate 2). They may look like twin sisters in their show-girl outfits but Cathy Peace's 'Julie' is a female and Chris Green's character is a man in drag called Julie and not a female character. In the course of their hour-long show, the two Julies present songs, monologues, audience participation game shows, scripted skits and impersonations in a variety of styles taken from music hall, melodrama, burlesque, traditional drag, end-of-the pier stand-up comedy routines, pantomime, clowning and acrobatics. They play various characters within these scenes and, while there is material to do with gender play in the textual content of the pieces presented, there is no 'cross-gendering' of characters between the two performers.

They introduce themselves to their audiences as 'post-modern purveyors of pleasure, divas of deviant delight and the only male and female drag act in town'. The opening song is a tribute to three icons of the gay world: Mister Danny La Rue (whom they announce is their spiritual Father), Shirley Bassey and Barbara Windsor. Following the song, *The Divine Feud* starts with the Genesis story of creation and romps through various evolutionary periods of humanity: the discovery of the difference between male and female genitalia, the discovery of sex, the formation of the family structure and the battle of the sexes through various periods of sexual history. Within the Revue style format of their show, they present a skit in the style of the end-of-the-pier ventriloquist's act with Chris playing a gay ventriloquist and Cathy playing his puppet, Dumpy Dyke. Here, the audience are warmed up through a series of calls and games into representing an audience composed of gay and lesbian children. This provides the performers with ample opportunity to comment on the Age of Consent Law and Section 27 prohibiting homosexual information

being communicated to children in school, youth clubs etc. The dialogue between the puppet and the manipulator embodies this control and as the scene develops we learn that Dumpy Dyke is going to be set aside and not appear in public again. The ventriloquist will in future be using a new puppet, Tutu the Tranny, to reflect the new trends in entertainment. Dumpy Dyke offers to play the part of Tutu the Tranny and the matter is thrown open to the 'children in the audience' who may give whatever response they will. In the end, the ventriloquist and an 'adult' member of the audience (usually a woman volunteers from the audience) decide that Dumpy should not be allowed to play that part as she would never be a 'real' woman, only a 'constructed' one and that some of her 'sisters' would consider her to be 'disloyal', this being a reference to feminist writers like Janice Raymond who are largely seen as being unsympathetic to transgender issues and drag.

### **Interview Extracts (CG - Chris Green, CP - Cathy Peace)**

CG: I think Queer was supposed to be a lot of things that it never really delivered. When I think of 'Queer', I think of Freedom...

CP: Chic...

CG: Yeah. Queer young things, if you like. And it ends up being an exclusive thing not an inclusive thing at all. And, in a sense, it becomes run by gay men.

BB: I want you to explain a little more of that.

CG: Queer becomes fashion based, more 'life-style' based, it becomes 'cool' places to go, it doesn't become 'everybody can do what they want' and we're all bound by being transgressive, which is my understanding of the word. It becomes...

CP: Like you have to 'wear the clothes' and have the money, basically....

CG: Which is a real shame because I think that 'Queer' is a really good idea.

BB: Why? What's good about it?

CG: Because essentially it is an inclusive term. And any movement and group of people has to re-invent what they're about in every generation.

CP: And it's also re-inventing it beyond gender lines. Aside from the transexual and transgender thing it's also about lesbians and gay men being 'queer'. But, as you say, it's been removed from that whole idea...

BB: Are you saying that the consumerization of the notion has degraded the term in some sense?

CG: Yeah but I'm not sure if you can distinguish it, really. The consumerization of Queerness has become what a lot of it is about now. It's when Queer became a life-style rather than an attitude. That's a bit of a sound-bite and I'm not sure I really mean that...

.....  
 CP: We do call ourselves Queer because the essence of it encompasses what we do. We are a lesbian and a gay man doing theatre work but we're not necessarily limited by being a gay man and a lesbian. I'm not an archetypal lesbian and Chris isn't an archetypal gay man.

BB: So, there's a searching for 'queerness' in order to reinvent ways of relating between gay men, lesbians and transgendered people that is different from the archetypes.

CP: Yeah.

BB: There is another aspect of Queer used as the verb 'to queer' meaning 'to spoil'.

CG: Queering the pitch.

CP: Yeah.

BB: Which contains the notion that queer performers should be spoiling something. Would you see that as part of what you're doing? Or are you at the same time celebrating something?

CP: Well, It depends. Things like 'Dumpy Dyke' and 'E Boy' is part of deconstructing traditional gay images. Saying let's take them out and have a look at them and then comment on them -...

BB: Make a critique?

CP: Yeah, saying - is that such an ace lifestyle? Is that such an ace position to be in? A lot of the stuff we've done around drag - particularly the 70s section we do in *Plush* with the drag queen and then the stripper which was very much looking at the misogyny of gay men at that time, of that aspect of drag.

CG: I think deconstructing is an interesting concept and process but I'm not sure how

much we do that. We put people and images on the stage and we invite criticism of people and in that sense, we invite the audience to... allow the audience to deconstruct them. We don't say within the performance itself 'We want you to dislike them' or 'We don't approve of them'.

CP: We're not offering an analysis of it. We're offering it as a performance. 'If I only had a dick' is a case in point. It's very ambiguous what we're saying in that. We know where we're coming from on that but it has elicited very different responses from very different audiences.

.....  
 CP: I got really interested in drag, partly because I had been watching a lot of drag and there was a great deal of men taking the piss out of women and I felt there was something for me as a woman performer to do in that field and partly because of the scope that kind of performance gives you. One of the bits we do in *Plush* has a character based on that kind of drag queen.

CG: And that's completely subversive, as I see it.

CP: I did a lot of street theatre and clowning and cabaret within a straight context and I used to play a lot of older women characters in straight theatre and it was basically, a bit like dragging up, putting on all sorts of stuff that I'm not and, essentially, that's dragging up.

BB: But is that any different from being a actor playing a part? How does it make it drag?

CP: In a sense, of course, it is no different but the important thing for me is that drag has very strong roots in that kind of stereotype, grotesque, larger than life portrayals that come from clowning, burlesque, freak shows, that kind of thing. That's different from acting as such. And in some ways, drag is genderless. You may see a man doing it, usually, but it's a man taking that kind of performance strength from doing it. Obviously Chris is in cross-gender drag some of the time but not all. It's about dressing up, the heightened make-up, the false eye-lashes and all that goes with that kind of blown-up, portrayal of stereotype, glam, show-girlie female images. I'm not being an actress when I'm doing that, I'm being more like a drag performer. I mean, French and Saunders do their male characters very well but they are terribly dull but what they do a lot of the rest of the time is drag, as far as I'm concerned. So is a lot of what was going on in *Absolutely Fabulous*, both with Saunders and Joanna Lumley - but especially with Joanna Lumley. The portrayals of those archetypal feminine roles has been traditionally linked with drag. That's what I'm interested in. Not portraying glamorous feminine roles that make me appear to be sexually available but performance in the way that men in frocks can do. They can be crude and out there. But a woman doing the same thing is challenged. I don't male impersonate. I'm not interested in that. It's dull. Dragging as a man is really merely wearing a suit and women do that anyway. Also, the performance possibilities in that are so limited.

## F. THE DIVINE DAVID

Describing himself as an *avant garde* performance artist, David Hoyle has performed in several venues in London over the last two years - mainly at Duckie, a once-weekly bar hosted by Amy Lamé, and at his own performance nights (in a variety of venues including The Royal Vauxhall Tavern and The Market Tavern public houses and the Connaught's Brasserie at Connaught's Hotel in Holborn) called variously 'Viva Apathy!', 'Viva Viva Apathy!!', 'Viva Viva Viva Apathy!!!', 'Inn-Difference' and 'Sectioned'. His *Traditional Comedy Drag Mime Tour* played at a variety of gay bars in London. He does not work to fixed texts though he returns to similar issues and items in each of his performances in which he incorporates songs, monologues, mime, dance and painting. His performances embody what may be called an anarchist stance against Authority, institutionalized religion, the gender class system, heterosexist culture, the 'gay scene' and consumerist entertainment and art.

### **The Venue: The Market Tavern, Nine Elms, South London**

The Market Tavern is a gay bar mostly associated with the 'leather' scene. There is a long bar down the middle of the space making for a rather narrow but long performance space. There are smaller bars in the interior of the building but they are too small to use for any kind of performance. The performance area is really the dance area on disco nights and it runs along and right in front of the bar itself and can be used flexibly, depending on the needs of the performer. As it is long and somewhat narrow, however, sight-lines are not good and any performance that includes visual elements needs to be staged in a corner to get the maximum capacity of audience. For this performance, a small platform has been erected in the corner to serve as the stage. There is a small booth for the d-j, Father Cloth,

a few feet away from the stage right end of the platform. There are a few short steps for the performer to climb on to the stage. At the back of the stage hang very large sheets of white paper in front of which there are plastic pots of poster paint lined up. A microphone on a tall stand is placed downstage centre. On this evening, the only people in the bar are those who have come for The Divine David's performance so there is no other pub activity going on.

### **The Performance: Viva Viva Apathy! (September 1996)**

A few moments before the performance is to begin, The Divine David (Plate 3) can be seen with a drink in hand, laughing and chatting with the audience. He moves around a lot, greeting people, appearing to play the role of 'host' for the night. For this performance he is dressed in a lime green, satin, two-piece suit with Gothic make-up on his face, black lip-stick, enormous paste ear-rings, glittering costume jewellery, fish-net tights and stiletto-heeled shoes. He ascends the stage in a somewhat imperious manner and strides commandingly up and down the stage smoking a cigarette in a long-stemmed cigarette holder, sipping his drink. He then laughs, throws his head back and begins the performance by addressing the audience in a declamatory manner as if he is delivering a speech to a massed gathering in a very large hall, emphasizing certain words with a jerk of his head or a sudden gesture of his hand and arm, usually in an assertive outward movement:

Ladies UNT Gentlemen! Thank you all for coming along to share this evening with us tonight. We are at the CUTTING EDGE of the *avant garde*. I am THE Divine David - THE Divine David - and I am here to tell each and everyone of you Ladies UNT Gentlemen in this AUDITORIUM tonight - whether or not you have come to stare at the BULGES in trousers imagining what the toilet parts look like - whether or not you have yet to develop an INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY- I have to tell you that each and everyone of you is - BEAUTIFUL!!

He spits out the word 'beautiful' with a fierce shake of the head and then almost immediately gives the audience a beaming smile and in a light, almost playful tone and with a slight shudder of the shoulders he says:

Isn't that MARvellous! (The audience laugh and he responds with a little giggle and a shrug of his shoulders. He points to a woman in the front) She's beautiful! Aren't you just lovely? And YOU're beautiful! ( To a man at the side in a sports suit) Aren't you? Aren't you? (He says this teasingly) What IS that written across your chest? Is that your name? UMBRO!... UMBRO! Quite a ring to it, hasn't it?... UMBRO! (He repeats it and cocks his head to one side as if he is trying to savour the sound. The man mutters something) Oh, it's NOT your name?...Oh, it's a SPORTS suit! (He over-emphasizes the word 'SPORTS', exaggerating his facial muscles to express the 'OR' sound with his eyes widening and his mouth rounding out) A SPORTS suit! - You're beautiful! (He comes down from the stage to walk amongst the audience remarking on what people are wearing saying 'That's beautiful!' to various people and makes his way back on to the stage.)

Every single one of us, Ladies UNT Gentlemen, is a BEAUTIFUL IN-DIVIDUAL! And we are all going to die! (He gives a little giggle) Isn't that lovely! Just remember as you leave tonight and go home to your sad little bedsits - I know that's what I'm going to do - that we are ALL OF US more than a collection of cells and organs and that WHATEVER WE ARE, WE ARE ALL OF US BEAUTIFUL and that one day (He chuckles)...we will die! Isn't that marvellous? It doesn't matter what genital arrangements you may have - whether you have EXTERNAL genital ORGANS or INTERNAL GENITAL organs, you're all going to die! (He says this with a delighted mischievous gurgling sound). There's no such thing as GENDER. There's no such thing as men and women. All there is, is being. You're born. You are. You die. You've been. The categories don't exist. They are only words and words are only a polite way of grunting, we've transcended that.

The audience laugh, cheer and applaud.

His mood suddenly seems to change and he walks about the stage snatching at the air as if waiting for inspiration and says:

I feel an impression coming on...yes, I definitely feel...like doing one of these...

He strikes an 'abstract' pose. The audience laughs and applauds.

Did you like that?.. Shall I do it again?..(He repeats the pose)... Or one of these...

He strikes another 'abstract' pose. After two or three of these poses he stops and says:

Well, we are on the CUTTING EDGE of the AVANT GARDE! Father Cloth, may

we have some music!

Here The Divine David sings *Bingo!* There is little melody in this music and his vocalization ranges from very low guttural sounds to short sharp snapping and shouting:

It's a GAME! It's a GAME!  
 Any NUMBER! Any NUM-BAH!  
 Can play!  
 It's a GAME! It's a GAME!  
 ANY NUMBER! ANY Number!  
 Can PLAY!  
 BINGO!  
 BINGO!  
 BINGO!

The words are repeated with a variety of treatments and when it finally ends The Divine David thanks the audience and the performance stops for the interval.

The second half of the show is focused around The Divine David's art. He explains that he will produce an art work on the very large sheets of paper that are hung on the back of the stage. He asks the audience for suggestions and the suggestions vary from the Manchester Bomber to a celebration of drugs. He chooses a celebration of drugs and, using the plastic pots of poster paints that are lined up on the side of the stage, he starts by squirting the paint directly on to the paper and then spreading it around with a brush or with the nozzle end of the pot itself. The colours are mainly black, yellow, red and green.

He calls out to Father Cloth for music and Father Cloth plays *The Drugs Don't Work* by *The Verve*. The painting takes about twenty minutes as he starts, from the first splashes, to create a large picture of the face of a person smoking a 'joint'. It is not so much a 'portrait' as a panorama of blotches and whirls. In the corner one can discern some more smaller faces surrounded by whirls of paint that look like tablets and syringes, large green patches that resemble cannabis leaves and a large bright yellow area that has the makings

of a sun. As he creates, The Divine David dances, waves his arms about and splashes paint all over the stage as *The Verve* sing:

No, the drugs don't work  
They only make things worse  
But I know I'll see your face again!

By the end of the process, he has created a very powerful picture of several faces some bright and round, others skull-like, all of them somewhat ghoulish, surrounded by a variety of drugs in a green and bright environment. He ends the painting to cheers and applause.

I am here to say - Don't listen to the SHITE! - The drugs DO WORK! We ARE the FUTURE! If there is anyone left amongst you in this auditorium tonight who still believes that we ARE anything at all to do with the fact that we may have external genital organs or internal genital organs or that the fact we may or may not have external or internal genital organs has ANYTHING AT ALL to do with why we are here and with who we REALLY ARE then I suggest you go home, get yourself a BRAIN, a GUN and SHOOT yourself! It will be the kindest thing you can do! Isn't that marvellous? (Loud whistles, applause from the audience).

#### G. AMY LAMÉ (Plate 4)

Amy Lamé is Hostess of the once-weekly Duckie bar, a performance-oriented night club at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern public house. Since November 1995, Amy Lamé (Amy Caddle) has performed in her own scripted shows - *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* (1995) which toured venues including the ICA, the Green Room (Manchester), Central Station and The Two Brewers public houses in London, and *Cum Manifesto* (1996) that was performed on Hampstead Heath, the Rochdale Canal, Manchester and various bars on the gay cabaret circuit. Her performances incorporate scripted monologues, improvised dialogue with the audience, mime (lip sync) to recorded music and audience participation games.

## **‘Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian’s Body’ (1995)**

### **The Venue: The Royal Vauxhall Tavern**

#### **The Performance**

Amy Lamé enters the stage area with her hair in bunches, takes her place in front of a microphone and addresses the audience. With the exception of the ‘audience participation’ section of the show, Lamé works to a fixed text, extracts from which I have presented as written:

AL: Doris Day Changed My Life!  
 All ginghamed-up with a fabulous hairdo - a girl with a capital G if ever I saw one! I mean all that make up and hairspray... girl talk, pillow talk, pink puffy pillows and glow in the dark stars on the bedroom ceiling.

I never went in much for Judy Garland. Although she did wear a gingham dress in *The Wizard of Oz* - AND had a fab pair of shoes to go with her frock - AND she skipped her way through the movie carrying a basket. I mean, how much more camp could she be? After that though she just became a bit too butch for me. All that trouser wearing did her no good. I mean, even Doris Day in *Calamity Jane* trashed her trousers for a dress in the end. And we all know that Doris Day is a well known closet lesbian. She’s a girl who likes girls just like me!

Dykes can wear frilly frocks, silk stockings and Revlon’s Deep Red Diamonds lipstick. I mean, check shirts, jeans and Doc Martins are just so...eighties.

We are now verging on the millennium of the post lesbian. The time has come for girls who like girls to rejoice! For girls who like girls all dressed up with somewhere to go...

Here Lamé takes out her make-up bag and starts to put make up on her face while she continues addressing the audience:

It has been 389 years since Miguel Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*. 23 years, 34 weeks, 20 days, 17 minutes, and 47 seconds since I was conceived. Add exactly 9 months to that and that’s when I was born. I finished reading *Don Quixote* 17 days ago. Add 17 to that plus 2 hours and 35 minutes and here I am!

I met a gay man for the first time on October 12, 1987. My uncle Tom. My godfather. An alcoholic librarian known for his wild leather weekends on the lower east side. After uncle Tom there was James, Neal, Michael, Stephen, Gehrett, Joseph, Jason, Pablo, Simon, Carlos, Malcolm, Robert, Dominic... at this point,

infinity.

Lamé puts her make-up kit to one side and gives a big sigh.

And what about these gay men? These gay men? Well, they've always been my best friends. God, I remember James and I lying under the Christmas tree at my house talking for hours and hours and before we knew it the sun had risen and my father came downstairs to go to work, pulled me into the kitchen and said 'James - he's a little...y'know, y'know.' Little did he know that I was a little y'know, y'know.

And what about me? Because this show is about me. Amy Ruth Caddle Gallego Rufino Olé Glamour Lamé. Plump girl in spectacles. David Caseate fan. Lesbian Don Quixote. Camp queen. In search of Ms. Adventure, knight errantry, and my Dulcinea. As a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body.

For this performance I was searching for a size 22 flamenco dress - as a lesbian Don Quixote, a flamenco dress is absolutely essential. So I went to one of the foremost costumiers in London. I walked into the shop - I was looking pretty glamorous that day I must say - and asked the shop assistant if he had any flamenco dresses. He asked me what size. I responded proudly, '22' and he said, 'Oh it's for you!' He escorted me to the flamenco dress department, showed me a flounce or two and said, 'Sorry, none in your size. These costumes are made for dancers.'

Throughout the next speech Lamé gathers together two or three vary large sheets of gingham which have been cut and prepared in sections ready to be assembled into a dress.

Lamé fastens them together around her body with pins in a matter of moments to form a flamenco dress.

Dancers! Had that queen ever seen me dance the cha-cha or the Madison, not to mention flamenco? Well, after all, fat girls aren't supposed to be dancers, or models, or performers, or people. Lemme tell you somethin' wherever you are Mr. Angel's costumier shop assistant, this dance is for you. In the end I've got my dress.

Lamé is now fully dressed in her flamenco costume as taped music plays *I Feel Pretty* from *West Side Story*. Lamé mimes/lip syncs to the music in the style of a traditional drag comedy mime act. As the music ends she gives the audience a grand curtsy and resumes her text:

Don Quixote learned how to be a knight errant by reading books, books and more books about knight errantry. Then he hopped on his trusty, rusty ol' horse and set off in search of adventure. Every deed he did was in the name of his imaginary lover Dulcinea. Don Quixote quickly discovered that things don't always happen like they do in books. The pages he read were not reality. His quest for truth, justice and honour soon became a mirage - just like the deceptive images he saw while roaming the Spanish plains. I'm pretty much like Don Quixote, a Dona Quixota if you will. I learned how to be a lesbian by reading books, books and more books about lesbian reality.

I own a total of 437 books. 291 of these are about lesbians, gay men or sexual dissidence of some sort. I've read it all - *The Well of Loneliness*, *Gynaecology*, *The Feminine Mystic*, *Zami*, *Lesbian Nation*...oh, that's one of my favourites. I kind of realized that something was up when my ideal didn't consist of hating men and living in the countryside with my tits hanging out all day eating lentil burgers. So I hopped on a 747 from Newark to London and set off in search of adventure - and my Dulcinea. I thought I had found her in the form of a ginger-haired 18 year old from Accrington. She left the North, travelled South, and moved in with me after 2 weeks. She gave up her A-levels for 3 months of unbridled passion, which consisted of a perpetual dreamlike state whether we were awake or asleep. It all ended when I came very close to smothering her with a pillow after a particularly unsatisfying nuit d'amour. And just like Don Quixote, I realized that things don't always happen like they do in books. My search for the ideal combining a Northern lass, a futon and endless cups of tea soon became a mirage just like the deceptive images I saw while glancing through the pages of *Diva*, *Shebang* and *Phase*. Don Quixote's ideal chivalrous world never became a reality and my lesbian world hasn't become a reality. Even so, I never give up trying. I think the lesbians in the audience will agree - a cute girl with a removal van does not a Dulcinea make.

So I gave up the books and started hanging out with gay men.

For so many gay men I'm the perfect fashion accessory - a gay man trapped in a big femme lesbo body with an attitude that stamps out each and everyone of those queens. You've got the tight T-shirt, hair gel and beads - I'm the matching shoes and handbag! Someone to complement the wardrobe and toss away with a swish of the hips when the trend is over. Well, tonight is the night that I swish my hips!

At this point, Lamé walks down from the stage area into the audience as she converses with various individuals. The questions she asks them are fairly personal but the tone is light and seemingly purposeless: 'So where have you come from? Camden? All this way from Camden? And do you have a boyfriend? And is he here?' and 'What do you think of the dress, good, huh?' and 'Don't I know you from somewhere? You weren't at Angel's

costumier's by any chance, were you?'. She then returns to the stage and continues her text:

So where do you draw the line between fat and skinny, chubby and pleasantly plump? Between gay and straight? Butch and Femme? Between intriguingly bizarre and just plain fucked up?

I've searched for the answers just like I've searched for my Dulcinea and my ideal self. Somehow the two are inseparable. Just like how there are no answers.

Fantasy, reality, ideal, surreal all meld into one if you're a lesbian who only ever fell in love with gay men. And where does that leave me? Where does a camp, drag, gay man trapped in a big femme lesbo body fit in? With the drag queens? Bull dykes? Tea dance trannies? 70's lesbian womyn with a 'y'?

I fit in...I fit..I do fit!

Taped music plays: *Aren't you glad you're you?* while Lamé speaks over it:

And so do you. All of you. Every morning I wake up and look in the mirror and say, 'Amy, you're big, beautiful, glamorous, and the best thing since sliced bread'.

Lamé delivers this as if it is her own self-affirmation. Each adjective is accompanied by a gesture - with 'big' she spreads her arms in the air, with 'beautiful' and 'glamorous' she circles them in front of her body, sweeping them in an undulating motion around her breasts and hips and, finally, with 'the best thing since sliced bread' she brings them down on to her hips in a gesture of positive assertion and confident sexuality.

Now I want you all to do the same thing.

She then invites the audience to do the same affirmation and takes them through it word for word with the accompanying gestures. Even the invitation to give themselves 'a pat on the back' is orchestrated with the audience performing the gestures along with her. The piece ends with a speech that is spoken in modulated, undulating tones rather like a blessing or final commendation:

It's OK to like yourself. Give yourselves a hug. Go on.....If Don Quixote had given himself a hug from the start he wouldn't have had so many problems. Rejoice in

yourself. Doris Day does. I do. Now it's your turn. This world is full of too many people ready to put you down for who and what you are. Just remember, like my ol' Mom always said, 'What goes around, comes around'. It's true! Another thing my Mom always said is, 'You can't love anyone else unless you love yourself first!' So I want all of you, each and every one of you, to leave here this evening with a smile on your face, a song on your lips, a dance in your step and a big, fat bubble of love in your heart!

### **Amy Lamé's 'Cum Manifesto' (1997)**

#### **The Venue: Hampstead Heath, London**

There is a stage erected in a small area near the commencement of that part of Hampstead Heath that is well-known as the 'cruising' ground used by gay men for sexual encounters. It is a fairly rudimentary stage with no curtains, no wing space, and no stage lights. A few strategically placed lamps are hung from nearby trees and bushes and the performance takes place in the over-spill from these lanterns. There are some loudspeakers and amplifiers installed near or on a number of trees and to the front of the stage. There is a small set of steps to the rear of the stage to give Lamé access but there are none at the front of the stage. This creates a sense of distance between the performer and the audience that is not usual in Lamé's performances.

The audience consists of people who have specifically come to the performance as well as anyone who happens to be on a walk on the Heath and, of course, any gay men who discover the performance when they emerge from the bushes either after or prior to having been on a 'cruise'. The audience sits on the grass in front of the stage or between the bushes and there is no refreshment stall. The audience area quickly becomes littered with cigarette ends, empty-beer cans, crisp packets and so on. The overall effect is that of being

at a mini version of the Glastonbury Music Festival.

### **The Performance**

On entering the stage, Lamé walks straight up to the microphone and addresses her first speech to the audience in which she tells us that she had a dream in which she was a gay boy:

Boys and girls, last night I had a dream. A dream that was so incredibly real it was almost scary...I dreamt I was a gay boy. And in my dream I went to every single cottage and cruising area in the country, starred in a porn film, shaved my balls, had a hard on ALL the time, wore a cockring, took loads of poppers, sucked 200 cocks, wanked, fucked loads of guys up the arse, and got fucked up the arse myself.

THEN I WOKE UP. And realised that my dream will never become a reality.

So this show is dedicated to all you real-life fuckers, suckers and wankers out there tonight. And here's a little song I've written, just for you.

Lamé sings *Any Queen Will Do* to the tune of Jason Donovan's *Any Dream Will Do*:

I closed my eyes  
drew back the curtains  
to see for certain what I thought I knew  
Yes, he was gay  
and he was cruising probably for a bruising  
Any queen will do.

He wore his coat for golden showers  
that big girl's blouse  
he looks a lot like you.  
Down on his knees  
or bending over  
either drunk or sober  
Any queen will do.

A crash of drums  
a flash of light  
his golden coat  
flew out of sight  
The gay boys faded into darkness, he was left alone.

But he'll return to Clapham Common

maybe with his strap-on  
Another queen will do.

I'm sure the guys will be there waiting  
not hesitating  
Any queen will do.

Her next speech relates a story about her experiences cruising 'as a gay man'.

Oh my God!!! What the FUCK am I doing on Hampstead Heath at 12:30 at night?? SOME people might get the wrong impression and think I'm here to cruise. Well, it's kinda too late for that because it was just last week that I thought if I wanted to know the ins and outs, so to speak, of gay men's sex lives, I had to try cruising for myself. So, in my best boy drag, looking like Harvey Fierstein on a GOOD day, I came to the Heath and I assumed THE position against a tree...and waited. I thrust my pelvis out and waited. I stared blankly into space, and waited some more. I waved some condoms in the air and thrust my pelvis out even further. And FINALLY someone came up to me. Unfortunately he was wearing an anorak and goggles, grabbed the condoms out of my hand and ran into a nearby cluster of bushes. So, after three hours spent contorted into my special cruising stance without any offers, I realised three vital facts about cruising. Do you want to know what they are???

1. Beware of gay men wearing anoraks.
2. Dressing like Harvey Fierstein won't get you anywhere, and
3. Cruising has got to be the most ridiculous pastime I've ever participated in. It's much easier to stay in and wank to a porn film.

OK, how many of you gay boys out there watch porn movies? Oh COME ON! I expect to see every hand raised.! You there in the back--get your hand up! Don't be shy! I bet you're the type who watches porn and has a wank with the curtains shut!

Here Lamé ad-libs generally with the audience around the theme of porn movies. The questions are of the order of 'So who's your favourite porn star', 'Come on, don't tell me you don't watch them. I know you gay boys like big wangers, don't you?'

She then resumes her text:

Kris Lord, John Davenport, Jeff Stryker, Kip Noll, and Rick 'Humungous' Donovan. You love them, don't you, dirty bitch!. But what I want to know is... where are all the lesbian porn stars???. I mean, there's no female equivalent to Jeff Stryker...some luscious babe with a twelve inch clit. And if there were, she would leave the world of porn films to become my girlfriend...OF COURSE! Because porn films are REAL!!! I mean, don't all you boyz have sex like they do in 'Down

and Dirty in Dallas'? Isn't everyone perfectly pecced and chiselled? Don't we ALL cum at just the right moment EVERY time? WE never have spots, or wrinkles, or stretch marks, do we? And we all have gigantic pulsating perfect dicks and clits which don't need to rest in between sessions. And, of course, we don't have to use condoms. After all, you never see PORN STAR wearing a condom. Nevertheless, I still have faith in the porn industry and in humanity, that there is a porn star out there in the audience tonight who knows better and carries condoms with him all the time. ANY PORN STARS OUT THERE TONIGHT??? C'mon...you, the one who didn't raise his hand before. OK, the first porn star to come up on stage with a condom gets this lucky bag.

Lamé holds up a bag and shows the audience but we don't quite know what is in it. A male volunteer from the audience takes the role of 'Porn Star' and climbs on to the stage. Lamé has a chat with him as if he is a real porn star and the chat revolves around his favourite sexual position, whether he uses condoms or not, how many penises he has sucked, any advice for would-be porn stars and so on. The volunteer is very convincing in the role play. Some members of the audience shout to Lamé that they think he might actually be a porn star. Lamé shouts back:

Of course he is! What, do you think this is some kind of fantasy? My Gosh, I really don't understand you people!

The volunteer begins to giggle. The audience laugh and applaud. The volunteer playing the role of 'Porn Star' is asked to help Lamé out of her dress while typical porn movie music plays on a tape. Lamé fastens a large black dildo on a belt around her waist and asks 'Porn Star' if he can put a condom on it using only his mouth. He succeeds and Lamé asks the audience to give him a round of applause. She then continues with her text:

How many of you lose your stiffy when you put a condom on? OH MY GOD you just got a hard on when I SAID the word condom! Look at that bulge! (and I don't mean your belly, luv!) Well, darling, you're one lucky man 'cause lots of guys go limp at the sight of a rubber. Now, I know some of you guys like big wangers. But if somebody says to you 'I don't use condoms 'cause I can't find any big enough to fit me...', take my advice and don't believe him. Believe it or not, I can fit every brand of condom made in this country over my head. And if his willy is bigger than my head, STAY AWAY! It's dangerous!

I know you're thinking: 'What the FUCK does a lesbian know about safer sex? How can some big loudmouthed American dyke get up on stage and tell ME what to do with my dick???' Well, honey, we dykes know a lot more than you think!! It doesn't matter who you shag, where you shag them or what their HIV status is. Go ahead, be a slag. Just be safe. And a song for all you slags out there.

Lamé sings *There Are Worse Things I Could Do* from *Grease*.

Now we've reached my favourite part of the show, the part where I get to delve into the audience and ask you highly personal and embarrassing questions!! OK....

Here Lamé leads the audience in a Quiz game on safer sex strategies. The questions have multiple choice answers and range from the serious such as:

What are the best condoms for up the anal sex?

a) Durex Ultra Strong; b) HT Specials; c) lager and lime flavoured or d) glow in the dark condoms

to the ludicrous such as:

Are the following activities SAFE or UNSAFE?

a) Wanking; b) Sucking; c) Perming your hair; d) Perming someone else's hair.

At the end of the safer sex quiz Lamé resumes her text:

You know, when I was a little girl, my mom always told me, 'Sticks and stones may break your bones but names will never hurt you.' How many of you were called poofter on the playground? I want to hear you say YEAH! If you're a pillowmuncher, I want to hear you say YEAH! If you're a pussybumper! The time has come for cuntlickers and buttfuckers of the world to unite!

Now. Repeat after me... (touching parts of body as they are mentioned) I have got very beautiful lips..... I have got a very beautiful bum.... I have got very beautiful tits....I have got a very beautiful dick.... I have got a very beautiful clit.

Lamé sings Whitney Houston's *The Greatest Love of All* and then proceeds to the last speech of the show:

My friends, on this night of all nights, I want you to raise your glass and say...

I BELONG. I belong to the club of outcasts. I belong to a club whose members have been kicked and beaten....a club whose members were taunted and teased at school and chosen last for the football team. A club where membership is free

because we've already paid our dues. A club with no walls but an open door...and a club without rules because we've broken them all already. It would have intimate tables where a corduroy-ed gay man would be looking into the eyes and holding the hand of a female to male transsexual while two really girly dykes dance to Gary Numan on an under-lit dance floor....S/M lesbians would be showing drag queens how to tie bondage knots, and indie queer boys would be chatting about breast-feeding with a lesbian mother and her gay male lover. Everyone would be welcome, regardless of HIV status.

Throughout the speech, members of the audience have begun to cheer and call out to Lamé: 'Amy! Amy!'. A few of them have lit their cigarette lighters and are holding them up in the air. It is now late night on the Heath and the effect is beginning to resemble a candle-light vigil.

It would be a club where being an outsider would make you an insider. Feelings of isolation and despair would be replaced by hope and celebration. It's a place where everyone believes in themselves and no one is a victim. Please join. I'd love to greet you at that open door.

### **Interview Extracts**

BB: So when you started your performance was the ICA show the first thing you ever did?

AL: Yeah. That was the first time I'd ever been on stage. In *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*.

BB: And in that show you were presenting yourself?

AL: Oh, yeah. I was me. I wasn't a character or anything like that, you know. When I wrote that it wasn't originally written to be performed, really. It was written out of frustration and a sense of isolation.....

BB: What did the frustration and isolation involve?

AL: Basically, a feeling of ostracism from the lesbian community and I had felt for some time that I didn't belong and that I wasn't really wanted. My coming out was from reading all these books on lesbian theory, lesbian novels, this, that and the other thing, trying to get a grip on what it is like to be a lesbian. And then I thought, 'Now I'm ready to come out. I've got all this knowledge. Now I can come out and put it into practice.' And I came out. From what I had read I had thought there was this community waiting to embrace young lesbians with open

arms. And it wasn't true. I, basically, fell flat on my face. I'd go to lesbian bars in New York and, you know, I'd always have loads of gay male friends and everyone would look at me and assume that I was a fag hag.

BB: So was this mainly an image thing or your behaviour as well?

AL: It was the way I was dressed and, it was, well, people tend to judge people on first appearances. So if I showed up in pigtails and a little pink dress, and this was some years ago 4 or 5 years ago, people would react like, 'Just what is she on?' kind of thing. Especially in New York where there is the look of that particular city, that particular bar. And when I came to London it was the same thing. I would go to *Venus Rising* and some of the women would immediately react to my wearing a skirt and this was pre- 'Lipstick Lesbian' - before the media corruption of lesbian imagery. This was before all that. So images of very feminine lesbians didn't abound at all. So that's why *Gay Man Trapped in Lesbian's Body* in part was written. Because I felt I identified culturally with gay men and I felt like I was a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body because there was no place for me it seemed in the lesbian world and lesbian culture at that time.

BB: What does that mean, more specifically?

AL: My mind, everything... I felt, honestly, like there was more in common between me and gay men than between me and what lesbians were supposed to be like then. I had all these gay men around me. All of my friends were gay men. Most of them when I was growing up. I don't know whether I took on their sensibilities, whether they kind of nurtured something within me but, obviously, I felt very comfortable with them. I felt like this is me.

BB: So what would you say are the differences in the sensibilities between gay men and lesbians?

AL: I think - a sense of fun, frivolity and, of course this is a generalization and I'm only saying this was my experience - but a lot of the lesbians that I've met since do have that same sense of fun and frivolity which is the kind of sensibility that I look for now in anyone, regardless of their sexuality. But at that particular time it felt just like a wasteland

.....  
AL: I think that lesbians should reclaim the feminine, basically. I think there's nothing wrong with that. I think that's something to celebrate. In my life what I try to do continually is reclaim things that are feminine as my own. I think a lot of lesbians have lost that and I think traditionally feminine things are very important and very good. I think a lot of lesbians will have problems and that that is very anti-feminist. But I don't think it is. It's not. I think things that are historically and traditional feminine. Some people do say, you know that that is men putting us in those roles but I think that some things come naturally to women as well and I don't think that is a bad thing and should definitely be celebrated. I don't want to be equal to a man because I don't to play on boy's terms. And I want to live on

my terms. I do not want to be equal to men because that's saying that the men's ideals are something worth being equal to. I don't want to aspire to that at all. And men and women are not the same.

BB: OK. In terms of the title of the piece *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*, one would be tempted to ask why a gay man in a lesbian's body? Why not a lesbian wanting to get out of a stereotype or something more woman-defined? I mean, it could suggest to someone coming upon that title that there's more being dealt with here - perhaps challenging gender positions, perhaps challenging sexuality positions in a more universal sense than challenging images within the lesbian community alone.

AL: That was how I felt. Because I identified culturally with gay men, because to me the world of gay men held much more appeal than that which was presented to me as the lesbian world. The title simply came to me when I was standing at the bar of *First Out* café one day. I felt so fed up and so full of questions like - why was I a lesbian? why was I born into this body? why couldn't I have been a gay man? It would also seem so much easier. And during all this I just said, 'I feel like a gay man in a lesbian's body'.

.....  
BB: .....one can take the view that lesbians' and gay men's images are themselves, inevitably part of the existing gender role images by virtue of the fact that they are men and women, and that women taking 'anti-feminine', if you like, images and objecting to, as you say, 'girlie' images may have been to some degree appropriating for themselves traditionally 'male role images' and eschewing stereotypical 'female role images' but merely reversing the images round and adopting 'butch' images as opposed to 'feminine' images does not mean that you are actually doing anything more than that. By appropriating the traditional images of the other gender one is still operating within the dual gender system and can one really do anything else if one is trying to challenge and resist the gender-ascribed images of the dominant culture? How would lesbians who perpetuate traditionally 'feminine' images be challenging or resisting the dominant traditional gender-ascribed images? How do you feel about these kinds of questions?

AL: I was just trying to be myself. I was not trying to take 'girlie' images and re-appropriate them. The only thing that I did by calling myself a lesbian drag Queen was taking the piss, basically out of lesbians who do take on traditionally regarded as 'butch' or 'non-girlie' images as if that is to be every lesbian's acceptable truth. I was saying this is lesbian drag because I am dressing as a feminine woman which a lesbian is not supposed to do and, therefore, I was expressing my truth and being myself.

BB: I understand that but I've also had people say to me about you, as Cathy Peace also has said to her, 'Why is she saying she's a drag Queen? Drag is about cross-dressing. She's not cross-dressing. So she shouldn't say she is doing drag.'

AL: But I *was* cross-dressing in terms of the style that was acceptable to lesbian

women, not in terms of gender.

BB: So the drag is seen in within the terms of prevalent lesbian images at the time and also in the fact that you used performance forms like lip-sync, miming, burlesque-type comedy forms that are also informed by the drag cabaret form which lesbian performers in mixed gay clubs hardly ever do.

AL: I got such hassle for saying 'I'm a lesbian drag Queen', especially from lesbian women. They didn't seem to understand. And since I've done the show I read things about lesbian performers describing themselves as lesbian drag queens.

BB: Cathy Peace has not described herself as a lesbian drag Queen but she has described some of her performances with Chris Green as being drag performances.

AL: Drag also has got itself such a bad rap over the piss-taking of women and the misogyny of the male drag performers. I personally don't have a problem with it. For me the misogyny of male drag consists in the words they use not the images. It's what they say. Drag influenced me very strongly anyway. It shows in the show in the bits like where I'm making my face up on the stage as part of the show, getting into my dress, finding a dress that fits me, the underlying theme of plenty of drag queens being 'Oh, how I suffer!' and the overcoming of that kind of struggle.

.....  
BB: I want to turn now to your role as host of *Duckie Club*. *Duckie* is billed as a place for 'boyzie girls' and 'girlzie boyz'. It seems to me that you're doing a lot of playing around with images. Your weekly thing of having a theme for each night some which were directly inviting people to play around with fantasies and images: 'Come dressed as a gay woman dressed as a man' and 'Come dressed as your favourite work of art' and 'Come as a prostitute'. Where does all this come from? Why do that? Why isn't it just a club which has performance on stage?

AL: I think the buzz is that sense of frivolity, the idea that you can play around with changing yourself, albeit for five hours on a Saturday evening but you can transform yourself for that time, that sense of being able to dress up which camp is all about, what drag has been about, really.....

BB: I suppose you could call it 'queening it'? Where you really dress up - over the top perhaps which people within a lot of other gay bars may not do - where they almost dress-down.

AL: Like our night where the theme was 'Gay Men dressed as Lesbians'. The whole idea of that was that everybody bloody dresses the same anyway. It's *Duckie's* sort of stab at social commentary. The girls are going to come dressed in jeans and T-shirts and the boys are going to come dressed in jeans and T-shirts and all the boys could be lesbians and all the lesbians could be gay men. A lot of our themes are our kind of fun mixed with stab-social commentary kind of things and a lot of the time they're based on in-jokes. For instance, this week we've got 'Dress

lesbian separatist' so we'll see what happens. We get some women there who weekly dress 'lesbian separatist' who don't bat an eyelash. But that will be the joke, you know. But though it's frivolous, I think it does make people stop and think for a bit. People who come for the first time, sometimes don't really know how to take us, like 'What the fuck's going down here?' And then maybe they catch on and see the funny side but also maybe think a bit about what underlies all this stuff. I like to think of *Duckie* as the club for the intelligent, homosexual punter.

BB: So the questions remain - is it a gay bar, is it a bi-sexual space, a mixed space, is it a Queer space, is it anybody's space at all if they want to have fun and frivolity or doesn't it really matter?

AL: Well, to me it does matter. If I had a choice it would be a club solely for gay and lesbian people. However, life is not like that really. The world is not made like that and, invariably, we are going to get people who don't identify themselves as gay or lesbian or bisexual, some of whom may not identify themselves sexually at all or with celibacy - who knows? We get people who don't know what they're 'in for' as such and show up at the door and actually have a fucking good time! And come back for more! And, also, I don't believe in grilling people on their sexuality at the door....I suppose it's an inclusive space.

BB: This business of 'looking gay' of course, can be seen as playing right into the costumes that are already gender-defined or of challenging the costumes that are gender-defined. Can we have it both ways? I'm not so sure. I mean, the whole thing about your dressing up themes is that they encourage the audience to dress up and come to the performance in costume themselves and in so far as they do come in costume they are not only audience members of the cabaret performance that they will see later on in the evening, they are to some extent performers in the entertainment as well.

AL: Yes, of course. That's why we invite that whole participation thing from the very beginning, getting the audience to say 'Hello Duckie' to each other and all that ritualized answering back stuff like they would do in Pantomime or whatever, Music Hall, I suppose.

BB: This leads me to the other point I wanted to bring up, the space use at the club. You have the stage area, which is raised with a curtain etc. very much theatre-like.

AL: Well, it is really a small theatre isn't it? Only it's a bar and not a theatre at all.

BB: Yes, you have the raised bit for the audience as well, at the back like a gallery - upper circle sort of thing! And you also use the toilet spaces by decorating them like part of a set with posters, pictures, pens and paper to encourage people to write on them, give them questions to respond to like on the David Bowie Theme night you had 'Ten reasons why David is a Wanker?' and 'Ten reasons to Love David' and 'Ten reasons to be afraid of David Bowie'. Why is that? Why can't you just

leave at least the toilets alone?

AL: That was my idea because so often you go to places where everything is going on in the space where it's meant to be going on and then the toilet areas are those areas that are almost like dropping out of the fantasy. Like the fantasy stops anyway when you leave the theatre or leave the bar or get to the taxi or the street but also in a lot of places it also stops because you leave the performance and go to the toilet. So we wanted one of those venues where public spaces and private spaces could be mixed up together - where the toilet is not only somewhere you go for essentially private and personal reasons but also somewhere where you can still participate in the happening while you're being private - the pens and paper hanging from the walls and ceilings invite a kind of interactive toilet place, messages can be left, games can be played, protests can be made, whatever. A private place in some ways because you're pissing or whatever but also a public arena for whatever you may be thinking about in private. It's also a kind of inverse of an art exhibition, if you will, in a museum you wander round and see works of art but not in the toilets.

.....

BB: Turning now to your performance *Cum Manifesto* which I have seen several times - there's a section in there when you talk to the audience about a 'Club of Outcasts'. What does that actually mean and is *Duckie* a 'Club of Outcasts'?

AL: Well, *Duckie* grew directly out of my writing *Cum Manifesto*. That end piece in that show about 'Club of Outcasts', a place where everyone who felt isolated and had a sense of not belonging anywhere, anyone who felt invisible would come and they would feel welcome and part of somewhere where there would be other individuals who also perhaps felt isolated and invisible in the main stream world. That's always how I felt and that's what *Gay Man Trapped in Lesbian's Body* came out of, but after *Cum Manifesto*, we decided to start a club, make this space of 'Outcasts', in a sense. A place where we can all come, where we can be ourselves, where you are not being a victim but where you can celebrate your individuality but also celebrate your Queerness. A place where you can come if you're, say, a female-to-male transsexual and not see yourself as a victim but somewhere where you are included.

## H. MARISA CARR (CARNESKY)

Marisa Carr (Carnesky), the only performer in this study who does not identify as a lesbian, is a performance artist who has worked with Queer performers such as Robert Pacitti's Company in their production of *Geek!*, and with her own group *The Dragon Ladies*. Her own solo appearances have included *Lady Muck* (1996) at the Green Room Theatre

Manchester, *Dolly Blue* (from the show *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue*) at the Duckie Club, the *Nine-Breasted Woman* at the *Duckie Prom Night* (1997) at the ICA and *Mademoiselle Lefort* at *The St. Valentine's Day Pleasure Promenade* (1998) under the railway arches at Vauxhall, South London. Her work which includes the full-length piece *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* which was scripted by her incorporates dance, costume (designed by Amanda Moss), use of the body (as canvas and as art object) within performance and scripted and improvised monologues.

**'Bloody Pearl' (from 'The Grotesque Burlesque Revue', 1997)**

**The Venue: Duckie Club at The Royal Vauxhall Tavern (p89)**

**The Performance**

The following extract of 'The Ballad of 'Violet Rose'' from *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue*, the entire text of which is presented in Appendix A, was performed by Marisa Carr (Carnesky) as a short solo spot on one of Duckie Club's performance nights. *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* is a subversion of the story of Bluebeard. The piece is centred around a character called Dolly Blue who is a bizarre, Victorian, music-hall show-girl (Plate 5) and who was supposed to have been Bluebeard's first wife. Captain Bluebeard comes to see Dolly Blue performing and falls in love with her. She marries him, he gives her a bouquet of violet roses. They go off to his boat and Bluebeard gives Dolly instructions never to go into his cabin. She disobeys him and goes into his chamber where she finds the dismembered corpses of women (his 'dead wives'). He has been coating them with porcelain and turning them into dolls. When he discovers Dolly's transgression he chops off her legs, turns her into the ship's mast and calls the ship *The Dolly Blue*. Dolly, the ship's mast, is still alive and she weeps tears of blood which flow into the ocean

and mingle with the oysters. A storm rages and the ship crashes. From the tears of blood, the petals of the violet roses, the oyster flesh and the pearls a diabolical creature is formed - Violet Rose, Dolly Blue transformed, who emerges from the sea and takes the skins off the bodies of the tattooed sailors. Having made herself a skin, Dolly Blue/Violet Rose (Plate 6) now transforms into Bloody Pearl and stalks the docks looking for sailors to feed off and replenish her skin.

The lights in the club go down momentarily and when they come up again, very dimly, Carr is already on the stage as *Bloody Pearl*. She paces up and down the stage in a menacing, stalking manner. Her head movements are jerky and her eyes dart about the audience as if devouring them. As she paces the stage, Carr recites *The Ballad of Bloody Pearl* which is delivered by a sailor in the original script.

**BP:** This is the ballad of Bloody Pearl,  
A fable amongst sailors and old street girls.  
In ports across the ocean at the dead of night you'll find her,  
She'll do you for a string of pearls  
For that's her favourite tender.

Carr delivers these lines in a declamatory manner. She lifts her arms and waves them around in the air above her head. She extracts a long string of beads from her bosom and flings it out into the audience with a triumphant smile.

But beware, beware I warn you,  
That's not what she's after.  
She'll take your skin, your fleshy shells  
And sew the bits together  
For a dress no less: A dress I say!  
A dress of human leather.

Carr pulls out another string of beads this time from a different part of her bosom. She does this very slowly, stalking up and down the stage, swaying her hips and smiling. The effect

is that of a strip-tease dance being performed on the stage. When the string is completely revealed she tosses it out into the audience.

This scarlet tattooed rose,  
with thorns that pierce and peel  
Will charm you with illusion,  
Illusion that will kill  
but between her thighs, deep inside

At this point Carr plunges her hand into her ‘crotch’ area where her costume forms a large vaginal shape and slowly reveals another string of beads

she keeps her favourite weapon,  
a stash of golden pearls that burn,  
burn the eyes of drunken lies.

Carr swings the beads into the audience.

And so she wanders, darkly she roams the earth by night,  
Her pearls of gold a secret  
From the relentless, heartless light.

The lights go down as Carr exits with the same swaying, stalking movement.

### **‘Mademoiselle Lefort’ at The St. Valentine’s Day Promenade Performance**

#### **The St. Valentine’s Day Promenade Performance (14 February 1998)**

Simon Casson and Amy Lamé of the Duckie Club organized and hosted the St. Valentine’s Day Pleasure Promenade in the Vauxhall as a celebration of the history of the area that since the opening of the Spring Gardens in 1661 has been a culturally rich and inspiring one. In the Promenade programme, Casson and Lamé make a direct association of the entertainment they provide at Duckie club with Music Hall:

*As the Pleasure Gardens met its demise in 1859, soon Music Hall entertainment developed just up the road in Lambeth Walk. It is from the Music Hall genre that we may make links between popular entertainment at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and the types of entertainment that have been on show at the Royal*

*Vauxhall Tavern since its opening in 1863. The Royal Vauxhall Tavern was an established gay venue in the early 1950s with drag entertainment as its centrepiece. Now it is the home not only to traditional drag but also to experimental performance and popular entertainment. We take our legacy seriously, and have a laugh doing it.*

In addition to its celebration of the historical roots of Vauxhall, performance and entertainment, the Promenade Performance was to acquire a political aspect as well as official plans were announced that the American developer to whom Lambeth Council sold the land was to pull down the City Farm, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern and the remains of the Spring Gardens in order to build a Leisure Centre and Complex. The Promenade Performance, then, became the starting point of a multiplicity of strategies employed by interested parties wishing to preserve the area and the Royal Vauxhall Tavern to struggle against what was seen as a fundamental and unwelcome change.

The Promenade Performance, guided by Amy Lamé, starts out from the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, moves along the main road, under the railway bridge, to a round-about which used to be known as the Vauxhall Cross Footbridge where the audience comes upon Chris Green, of *The Divine Feud*, dressed as *George de Mallencourt*, an 18th century singer-musician who originally had performed on the stage in the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. Chris Green gives a short enigmatic performance in which he is confused and doesn't know where he is. The tour continues across the Spring Gardens through the City Farm, round the back streets to St. Peter's Church on Kennington Lane, inside which Bette Bourne of *Bloodlips Theatre Co.* performs a monologue written by Neil Bartlett entitled *The Verger Queen*. The programme text reads:

*The Verger Queen is a Hackney Vaudevillian, one hymn short of the full Evensong and has been loitering with intent for over a hundred years....in a church. Her mind wanders as freely as her fingers, and in her monologue she strings together*

*local history, fragments of a church service and highlights of music hall routines... not to mention frying the odd sausage or two!*

From the church the audience is led along Kennington Lane to the railway arches, inside one of which Marisa Carr presents her performance of *Mademoiselle Lefort*, after which we are led back by our host to the Royal Vauxhall Tavern where Chris Green as *George de Mallencourt* performs a monologue during which the audience learn that George is actually not alive - he has been involved in some 'shenanigans' in the undergrowth at the rear of the gardens and was murdered in the early hours of Valentine's Day 1748. What we are seeing is his 'ghost' who is still confused and gravitating around the Tavern in order to do what he knows how to do best - sing. The first song, according to the programme notes, is a 17th century 'broadside ballad', so called as the lyrics would have been printed on one side of a sheet of paper, called *The Fair Maid of Islington*, also known as *The London Vintner Over-reached*, sung to the tune of *Sellenger's Round* or *Caper and Ferk It*. The second is a modern song called *Pavanne*, written by Richard Thompson, which has as its themes high glamour, sexual intrigue and murderous intent, which as the Promenade programme says:

*perfectly fit the ideas of 'facade' and 'fucking' that seem to be the historical legacy of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens.*

### **The Performance: 'Mademoiselle Lefort'**

As the audience make its way along the long dark tunnel in the railway arches in the distance, a small silhouette can be seen against the light from the opening at the far end. The figure is thrashing about in what seemed like despair. The shadowy figure runs from side to side, slides along the walls, throws itself on to the floor, flays its arms in the air. In the dim shadows of the arch the effect is one of a bat out of control. As the audience

gets nearer we notice that the body is dressed in a floor-length black gown, wears long full arm-length black sleeves, black shoes and is completely shrouded in a long white veil. The figure dances its swirling, spiralling, thrashing dance of despair and as the audience reaches close enough we see that it is a woman - this is Mademoiselle Lefort.

Throughout this performance which is a combination of speech, movement, dance and performance art, Marisa speaks the improvised, jerky phrases to the audience, sometimes in French, sometimes in English. She keeps her head covered with the veil through which we notice that she has a fairly full dark beard. She is desperate and alone, in mourning, in grief. She asks the audience a number of questions repeating each one several times:

Who am I? Who am I? Do you know who I am? I don't know who I am.  
Where am I? Do you know where I am? I don't know where I am.  
What am I? Do you know what I am? I don't know what I am?

She removes her veil revealing a full black beard. Through the series of developing questions and statements, we learn that she is the original bearded lady from the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens of the early 1800s. Her unhappy spirit has been languishing for her past. The gardens have been obliterated now for a long time. She is lost in the modern Vauxhall neighbourhood looking for her roots - for answers to her questions about her identity and location. As the performance proceeds, she removes her outer clothing and we see her dressed in white Victorian under-garments. There is a red patch of 'blood' staining her 'crotch' area as a testament to her womanhood. We learn that she is afraid of rejection because of her 'freak' status: 'My mother said, "Everybody will laugh at you. They will all laugh at you"' and 'Are you laughing at me? Are you laughing at me?' She longs to be back in the Spring Gardens as she knew them and to dance for everybody as she used to do. As she looks closely at the audience she picks out one or two faces and remarks:

You, you look like a woman....and yet you have the face of a...man? You are a... man..?.. and yet you have hair just like a woman.

She gently touches the face of a young man wearing make-up and earrings and says:

You are a man and yet your face is soft and like a woman...Will you help me?

Recognizing that she has found herself among people who might be friendly and sympathetic to her, she asks the Queer folk if they can help her to an understanding of herself. She appeals to the audience to help and heal her. The performance ends with Carr running off down the length of the dark tunnel towards the Royal Vauxhall Tavern while the audience continue their promenade to the next performance.

### **Interview Extracts**

MC: *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* was for about forty minutes to an hour and it had three main characters. It was kind of cut-up and non-linear. It starts with a character called Dolly Blue. I eventually slung it round the Bluebeard story but the main ideas for the piece were around sailors, tattooed ladies, sort of around pantomime and a parade of sexuality. I had a false skin which was a collaboration with a visual artist which had over large breasts and a vagina. That was her vision and I mixed that with my vision which had these characters and dances and monologues. She was an art person and I'm a theatre person.....Also, Dolly Blue is called 'the peacock-lady'. There's a play with monsters, peacocks, tattooed bodies, images of sailors, images of women as peacocks (which relates to strippers as well), women as snakes, women as half-animal - particularly with the peacock lady. The peacock is male, so it's a parade of male sexuality through the female - an aggressive, showy, flamboyant sexuality that is made for men, for the male gaze. So my Dolly Blue girl, my show-girl, flamboyant peacock lady came partly from my grandma in the East End, her Jewishness, stories from my grandma....

.....  
BB: So what exactly is your role in all of this?

MC: What I do is - I write, I stage, I direct, I choreograph, I perform the shows and I work with visual artists and musicians to make these pieces and I kind of work in two places. I do the longer funded pieces that take months to make and then I also do the cabaret 'turns' where I develop ideas in a much more raw, anarchic, unrehearsed way.

BB: So is it like the larger pieces are the body of the material that you return to from time to time to do the more spontaneous pieces - your resource as it were?

MC: Yeah. That was one piece. The second piece *The Macabre Melodrama of Lottie Bone* starts with these bizarre Siamese twins. It was a bone marionette of Siamese twins that are murdered by the brothel-keeper's mad son and beetles crawled inside them and ate them all, and the Siamese twins were stuck together and had been filled with poison. And a rag-and-bone man found them a hundred years later in a really derelict house and when he rubbed this bone marionette in his hands he got sicker and sicker. It's really all about masochism and sexuality in that he rubs this bone marionette and she is full of poison. The more he rubbed her the sicker he got till eventually she stole his soul and she came back to life again.

BB: The underlying themes, obviously, are grotesque - something has been invaded, oppressed, something has been destroyed, out of that destruction there is an underground, almost subterranean, movement in order to resurrect some kind of newness and that newness has to be transformational. It really is very much part of what I'm seeing as gender transgressive Queer performance.

MC: What I'm trying to do is take - obviously my subject matter and my mental self are coming from a mixture of my interest in sexual archetypes, women and their sexual archetypes, and women's archetypes in entertainment - the carnivalesque, side-show street-woman or the comical whore or the vaudevillian, Mae West-Marie Lloyd music-hall character and then also the darker, more monster-woman animal-woman. I'm looking at the difference - and I've made these three ideas around the history of women in sexual entertainment - the side-show type entertainer and the erotic dances. What I've tried to do is look at traditional narratives and mix them with fairy tales, popular mythologies and these archetypes of women as sexually bizarre beings that are complex and interesting, partly grotesque and partly sexual, partly death-like, partly-male and partly-female. I'm taking narratives that are really traditional old-fashioned narratives either coming from pre-Grimm's fairy tales (where they Christianized the world of fairy tale) when fairy tales were about things like other worldliness, menstruation and death and using the traditional narrative to do exactly the opposite - to turn it upside down. So those are the two threads of what I'm doing.

.....  
BB: When I spoke to Cathy Peace from *The Divine Feud*, she said that when she did her shows with Chris Green she felt not so much an actress - though she was to some extent acting - as like a drag performer. What would you say you were being in your performances - a dancer, a performance artist, an actress?

MC: I do all different shows. I'm a performance artist, I think, mainly. I'm certainly not an actress because I don't act generally. The characters that I write are coming from a very personal place. I mean they are works of fiction but the fiction comes from me, comes from a certain place. I fictionalize part of my experience and I'm not portraying something that's not from somewhere inside me. So I'm not an actress. I'm not a puppet for some one else's ideas and don't perform funny

accents etc. It's not fringe theatre. It's definitely a cross between performance art and visual theatre. Performance art in that it's coming from quite a personal place inside me but also playing with extreme and subversive ideas that are transgressive from a personal place rather than an outer more general place.

.....  
 BB: But it informs so much of the style and the images in your work. Looking at the images of Dolly Blue - in terms of the grotesque body, there are other parts of the body that could be stressed in the costumes, for instance, and you don't. It's the head, the mouth, the vagina and the breasts.

MC: Yes, we're looking at the sexual body. We're looking at sexual entertainment. What I'm saying is that the work is complex - it's cerebral and emotional. It's quite intellectual and yet it's really entertaining and easy to follow as well. You were asking me what I see myself as on stage and I'm saying it has elements of ballet... it has elements of all these things which is why it's difficult for people to understand where it lives because it's got text and it's got choreography and strip-tease - all these things. And it's got personally led performance and fictional characters. The work is a fusion of all these things, a total kind of performance.....My artistry is not just about the script I write, the staging I make or the choreography I make and the preparation before the night, it's about the energy I bring to stage on the night and the way that I can bring transgressive ideas, the way that I can go past an idea in the way that the character within me does, play with hysteria, play with extreme emotion, play with fiction and play with personal history, play with all these things in a way that is breaking down theatrical traditions. Upholding them but breaking them at the same time. But it's also about working with live energy and the reactions to that and making changes and transformations on stage in a live environment.

I have also drawn from the work of the following Queer performers and theatre companies of whose work I am presenting less detailed accounts:

## **I. HELENA GOLDWATER**

Helena Goldwater is a performer who has referred to herself as a 'lesbian drag Queen' and as 'a Jewish drag Queen'. She has performed at various cabaret and performance venues including Lamé's *Duckie* club and the Green Room, Manchester. She also plays in Jewish social clubs and old people's homes. Combining aspects of vaudeville, cabaret and drag, Goldwater's pieces centre on her own preoccupations and explorations mainly around

sensual experience, textures and sexuality. She makes considerable use of wigs, frocks, objects, lingerie. Her show *Pucker* centres on pain, oral pleasure and fluids. In an interview with Frances Williams for *The Independent on Sunday* (Sept 8, 1996), Goldwater said:

I base a lot of my characters on the wonderful women I grew up with. They were really glamorous and I want to reclaim some of that in a feminist context. Although I look really over the top, it's not parody. This is who I am and where I come from; the fact that I'm a lesbian doesn't mean I'm disconnected from that. (Quoted by Williams in 'A Woman in Women's Clothing')

#### **J. IVAN CARTWRIGHT'S 'It Took More Than One Man' (Akimbo Theatre, 1996)**

In his one man show *It Took More Than One Man*, Ivan Cartwright (Plate 7) draws strongly on personal anecdote, old Hollywood movies and contemporary television advertizing to present his autobiographical performance about growing up queer in the North of England. Cartwright's narrative follows his development as a young gay man who starts to have hormonal treatment with the intention of having gender reassignment surgery. Having grown breasts and lived as a pre-operative transgendered woman he then decides that a constructed femaleness is no more suitable a gender for him than his biological maleness had been. After having his hormonal treatment reversed, he ends the show with a declaration of his own individual identity that he is the *kind of man* he is - 'the Queen' that he is and has always been. The allusion to more than one man plays not only on Cartwright's maleness before and after the hormonal treatment, but also on his double life as a drag queen. Cartwright says, 'Well, I've embroidered the garment but I haven't changed the outfit' referring to his identification as a Queen - a status for which gender reassignment surgery is immaterial and irrelevant as that process leads to gender certainty that is contained within the categorical gender system.

### **K. DOO COT's 'Peacock' (1994)**

Nenagh Watson, a performer/artist/ puppeteer, and Rachael Field, a visual artist, are artists in their own spheres of work. As Doo Cot, they are a lesbian partnership who have collaborated with writers, directors, designers and technicians forming the only lesbian/gay touring performance company in the UK using a mixture of performance and a variety of visual art strategies. Their performances incorporate scripted and improvised dialogue, a variety of puppets constructed out of 'found' objects and junk, shadow puppets, music, film, back projections, slides and improvised paintings projected onto the stage using OHPs.

Their show *Peacock* (1994) centred around the developing relationship between an isolated gay man, his newly acquired lover and an exotic peacock. While the central narrative followed the story of the gay man, the show also contained autobiographical elements and was a comment on and a critique of the agents of oppression in what is seen as an essentially anti-gay society. The two central male characters were represented by a selection of life-sized puppets that were manipulated by the two female performer/puppeteers who were always in full view of the audience, though dressed in black clothing to minimize their visibility.

In one scene in which the main character meets his lover, he visits a nightclub and watches a cabaret performance which includes a drag performer who sings a song to the audience - both the audience *in* the play and the audience *at* the play. The main male character in the story is represented by a puppet which is manipulated by a visible female puppeteer. The drag performer puppet (representing a male performer in female drag) is also manipulated

by a visible female puppeteer. The voice of the drag puppet singing the song is provided by a visible male performer in drag (Plate 8). The audience *in* the play is represented by a series of smaller puppets. As the story of *Peacock* develops, gender within the play appears to be presented more as state of flux, changeability and inter-changeability than as a unified, well-integrated state.

As the relationship between the two gay lovers with the peacock develops, we are introduced to the forces of oppression and bigotry, principally in the form of a large, loud, bull-dog puppet, which is manipulated with an appropriate level of aggression. These forces within the story are an ever-present threat, intent on destroying the happiness of the gay lovers and the peaceful beauty of the peacock. The central character of the narrative dies in an emotion-laden scene, which is presented in the style of Bunraku puppetry, and the exotic peacock that wanders into the urban lives of the two main characters is lost.

### **L GLORIA THEATRE'S 'Sarrasine'(1991)**

Gloria Theatre's production of *Sarrasine* (1991) is a dramatization of a short story by Balzac in which Sarrasine, a young sculptor, sees and falls in love with a singer, La Zimbanella, not realizing that she is a male *castrato* who plays women's parts in the Opera. La Zimbanella in this production was played by three actors - François Testory, a male actor from the *Bloolips* Company, in drag; Bette Bourne, a male actor, founder of *Bloolips* - well known for his performances with Lindsay Kemp and, most recently, for his portrayal of Lady Bracknell in *The English Stage Company's* production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1995), a production in which his was the sole drag part; and Beverly Klein, a female performer and singer. The strategy of having one character

simultaneously portrayed by three performers of different genders together with the juxtaposition of the world of opera with the world of the drag performer, urges the audience to invite multiple possibilities of thought, feeling, texture, gender and identity.

**PART TWO**

## **PART TWO**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER FLUIDITY AND LIMINALITY**

As I see the performers whose work I have been studying as intentionally *playing* with gender in order to undermine, refuse or challenge the male-female binary system and their performances as embodiments of this transgression of gender, I shall begin by discussing the notions and theories of gender identity that underpin my research. This will be followed by a presentation of gender transgression as I see it, which includes the complementary but essentially different process of *gender fluidity*.

Individuals like my dramatherapy clients and these performers employ strategies and present images that embody a sense of *gender fluidity*. I see this as being a 'shape-shifting' agenda of being 'in-between' genders and I am interested in exploring the extent to which these performances are relatable to 'carnival' and the 'carnavalesque', both of which have associations with liminality. I shall, therefore, consider the positions presented and strategies employed by them in terms of Turner's ideas of liminality, questioning the extent to which they may be considered to be liminal or liminoid. Here I am applying both the terms 'liminal' and 'liminoid' mainly in the context of gender role, gender behaviour and gender identity. By 'liminal' I mean being located in a 'no-man's-land betwixt-and-between.....expressive of ambiguous identity' (Turner,1990, p11), an accepted/sanctioned change within the binary, a position that is a fundamental acceptance of the binary rules but which has moved outside them temporarily. I am employing the term 'liminoid' to refer to a position that *freely* and *deliberately chooses* to break the rules of the binary, going further than any accepted/sanctioned exceptional position that remains within the

boundaries. I consider this distinction between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' to be a useful criterion when analyzing the extent to which these performers are intentionally breaking boundaries. As far as their gender fluid, shape-shifting images may be expressive of 'ambiguous identity' they may be identified with the liminal. However, as far as their gender fluid positions may represent individual *intentional* and *freely chosen* acts of rebellion or deliberate non-compliance I will suggest they may be identified with the liminoid within the context of the liminal.

### **Gender Identity**

In *Gender Identity Disorders in Children and Adults* (1985), Robert Stoller contrasts gender with sex, where the first signifies an individual's sense of being masculine or feminine and the latter refers to the biological attributes that constitute a male or female body. His fundamental concept is of a 'core gender identity'- the unshakeable basis of one's self image as being masculine or feminine. This differentiates during early childhood. Once a sense of being male or female has evolved in an individual it becomes an irreversible part of the person's self-image. In Stoller's view, gender identity is formed through several stages and is essentially dependent on 'imprinting', by which he means a process that involves imaginary modelling, symbolic assignments and educative conditioning. In other words, it is culturally conditioned.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) identifies this cultural conditioning as 'compulsory heterosexuality' and sees the polarization between masculine and feminine as being a product of the needs of the 'heterosexualization of desire':

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices

of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender and desire. (Butler, *ibid.* p23)

Any gender identities that do not conform to the cultural norms of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ have been seen either as pathologies (developmental failures), as medicalized problems (sicknesses) or as political stances (being engaged in a power struggle against the organizing principles of the dominant culture). The performances I have been studying are seen as, or are seen by the performers themselves as, embodying various responses within such a struggle. Therefore, before I deal with the concept of *gender fluidity*, I will outline some of the problematizing and pathologizing theories of sexuality and gender identity and present some of the counter-positions taken by other writers and theorists.

Stoller (*ibid.* 1968) distinguishes three layers of gender identity:

- a) ‘primordial femininity’ - the bedrock of all identity to which ‘psychic masculinity’ is a secondary development. At this stage the infant symbiotically identifies with the mother through the process of ‘imprinting’ during the first few months following birth. This layer produces a basically feminine identity regardless of biological sex.
- b) ‘core gender identity’ - resulting from the totality of conduct, assignations and educative conditioning towards the child, dependent on whether the child is assigned to the male or female sex. During this stage ‘psychic masculinity’ is formed in males, presupposing that the fusion with the mother is at an end.
- c) ‘the Oedipal layer’ - which is conflictive, involving rivalry with the father or mother, through which defensive mechanisms (which the child is forced to construct via the

Oedipus Complex) develop the child's 'core gender identity' which Stoller considers to be the most crucial. Within this model, then, should a boy child not develop an unshakeable male 'core gender identity' it would be because either he has failed to satisfactorily separate from the mother (psychically) or he has failed to resolve the Oedipal conflict.

For Jacques Lacan, the human subject is conceived in terms of intrinsic lack: it is a fragment of something larger and primordial, whose existence is dominated by the desire to retrieve some missing part of itself which is always out of reach. The subject is 'caught in the rails - eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else of Metonymy' (Lacan, 1977 p167). This sense of lack is extended to his view of the feminine. Using the semiotic theory of modern linguistics, he approaches the Oedipus Complex as a metaphor viewed in the manner of a signifying operation, involving the substitution of one signifier for another - in metaphor. The boy child is involved in a conflict in which he needs to exchange his 'desire for the mother' for what Lacan calls the 'Name-of-the-Father'. In order to deal with the problem of separating from the mother and still being sure of her desire, the boy child will try to become what seems to him to be the object of the desire that takes his mother's presence away from him - i.e. the 'Name-of-the-Father' or the signifier of the Father, the phallus. If the boy child fails to make this substitution he will fail to identify with the father and will take on the 'feminization effect' that links him to an identification with the phallus that the mother lacks (Lacan, *ibid.* p81). Whatever one's biological sex, it is one's relation to the phallus that determines whether one is a man or a woman. Lacan's model sees any gender identity that does not conform to compulsory heterosexuality as result of a 'lack' - a developmental failure.

In *Creativity and Perversion* (1985), Chassegeut-Smirgal extends her Freudian approach to maintain that any gender identity that does not conform to the 'organizing principles of culture', which include heterosexual sexual difference and the 'Law of the Father', is 'deviant' and 'perverse'. The pervert, she says, is both creative and destructive, 'seeking to escape the human condition' (p12), to rival God (p5) by reducing the existing order of things to excrement (p4), to parody and invert the order of the Father in order to destroy sexual reality and truth (p6) by erecting a false reality of sensation in order to validate his/her world view, almost like Lucifer (3-4). She sees this process as the result of the unsuccessful resolution of the Oedipus Complex, as a refusal to reach maturation, as an 'attempt to pass the exam without sitting it' (p12). Here again, any gender identity that does not conform to 'compulsory heterosexuality' is seen as a developmental failure and as engaged in a struggle with a regime of power.

Carl Jung's view was that man and woman are each incomplete without the other. There is an implication that heterosexuality is a 'given'. However, post-Jungians, like Andrew Samuels, question whether there can be absolute definitions of masculine and feminine and, if there were, whether it is necessary that men have more of the former and women more of the latter. Samuels offers us a pluralist perspective in which he says that it is not helpful to see gender as an invariant but that we are, as a race, not only divided into men and women but, also, into those who are certain about gender and those who are not; that *gender* itself engenders confusion. Samuels concedes that notions of gender difference may assist in the discussion of gender but, he says, it is not helpful to see them as innate opposites; nor should they be bound to bodies and anatomical definitions. The facts that a penis may penetrate and that a womb may contain tell us nothing about the psychological

or inner qualities of the people who have those organs. He introduces the notion of the 'imaginal body':

The link between psyche and body surely refers to the body as a whole; its moods, its movements, its prides and its shames... the body is already a psychological body, an imaginal body - providing a whole range of experiences - sometimes the imaginal body provides cross-over experiences, 'masculine' for women and 'feminine' for men. (Samuels, 1989 p101)

While this approach still seems to imply that those people who are not certain of their gender identity may be exceptional and that gender certainty is the bedrock of identity, it goes some way to permit a greater fluidity in the system. Samuels goes on to question the entire premise that heterosexuality is innate and fundamental and offers a vision of there being available to all a variety of positions in relation to gender role without recourse to the illusion of androgyny (Samuels, *ibid.* p105). When he says that we need to speak of gender in terms of 'multifarious potentials that are not yet available' (Samuels, 1990 p217), I suggest he opens the arena to notions of *gender fluidity* or what I refer to as *gender play*, for there is no reason to assume that the 'imaginal body' would provide such 'cross-over experiences' to any necessary degree of consistency for any individual man or woman.

Various writers and theorists have identified concepts of gender and sex as being the products of one power system or another. Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1969) contended that 'one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman' (p9). She conceded that this is under cultural compulsion. 'Woman' is inevitably marked as being 'the Other' in relation to the first sex which is the male. In contrast to this argument is Luce Irigaray's view (1985) that within a culture dominated by a language that is both 'masculinist' and 'phallogocentric' women are not representable. Far from being 'the Other' (De Beauvoir's

contention), the whole language of 'gender' and 'sex' belongs to a closed system of signification from which women are excluded.

For Michel Foucault, the binary system of sex and gender categorization is produced by a specific mode of sexuality (heterosexuality) and it is in the interest of this regime to regulate sexual experience. Foucault's fundamental proposition is that sexuality, itself, is not a 'drive' nor an innate natural force that is regulated by societal mores but 'a result and an instrument of power's designs' (Foucault, 1978 p105). While the prohibitive elements of power exert authority over sexuality, power itself works by producing, manipulating and maintaining sexualities. He sees the pervert's/deviant's/ transgressor's position as a 'historical construct' that is both marginalized and, at the same time, central to power.

Theorists like Elizabeth Grosz focus on the ontological status of sexual difference. In her essay 'Ontology and Equivocation: Derrida's Politics of Sexual Difference' in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (1995), she questions the entire issue of the primacy of gender by asking:

what is the ontological status of the sexed body? Is the body (presumably given by biology) the raw materials of social inscription and production? Or do modes of social inscription produce the body as sexually specific? Which comes 'first' - sexed bodies or the social markers of sexual difference? (Grosz, 1995, p 69)

In approaching these questions Grosz refers to Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist text *Geschlecht. Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference* (1983) in which Derrida founds his position with regard to the issue of sexual difference on Martin Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, human existence, literally translatable as 'there being', which Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* (1978, p 172) as a structural unity which implicates three elements -

state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*) and discourse (*logos*). Our individual existential situations, modes of Being, are determined by our understanding which is, according to Heidegger, all interpretation (*Auslegung*). In *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1984), Heidegger describes *Dasein* as being essentially *neutral*. He says

The peculiar neutrality of the term *Dasein* is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion...

and

This neutrality also indicates that *Dasein* is neither of the two sexes.  
(Heidegger, 1984, pp 136-137)

‘Being’, *Dasein*, itself, holds the potentiality of dispersing itself into multiplicities and, therefore, all attributes and possibilities, qualities and properties, including the modes of sex and gender. Derrida’s argument then is that, while *Dasein* does not belong to either of the sexes, that

doesn’t mean that its being is deprived of sex. On the contrary, here one must think of a pre-differential rather than a pre-dual sexuality - which doesn’t necessarily mean unitary, homogenous or undifferentiated. (Derrida, 1983 pp 71-72)

By this, Derrida is suggesting, as Grosz interprets it, that there is

a sexual difference that is neutral with respect to the sexes as they are currently or have been historically represented, a “raw material” out of which, through dispersion and splitting, sexual difference is rendered concrete and specific.  
(Grosz, *ibid.* p72)

Following on from this, Grosz says that it is ‘not easy to see how sexuality can be indeterminate’, that there must of necessity be at least two sexes, that how one lives one sexual potentiality depends on whether one is male or female but that there is an ‘ineradicable rift between the two’ which should not be seen in purely anatomical terms. However, later on she maintains that ‘each sex has the capacity to (and frequently does)

play with, become, a number of different sexualities but *not to take on the body and sex of the other*' (*ibid.* p 77, my italics). Grosz admits, however, that individuals whose sexual status is ambiguous and who are classifiable as 'intersexed' should not be understood to be 'indeterminate', except in the sense that they do not conform to the male-female binary, but as 'concrete, determinate, specific in their own morphologies' (*ibid.* p 236).

I have spent some time on this deconstructivist approach to sex/gender as it does question the innateness of sexual/gender difference as a 'given' in a manner in which the psychological and medical models presented do not, but also because it has a relevance, as I see it, for framing the ambiguous/transgressive gender positions taken by individuals like my dramatherapy clients and embodied by these performers in formulating and expressing their individual gender identities by not conforming to the male-female binary. Also, while acknowledging that they derive from different disciplines that have different agenda, I am tempted to see a correlation between Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, together with Derrida's elaboration on it as not belong to either sex but containing within itself the potentiality for 'dispersion into multiplicity', and Andrew Samuels' post-Jungian notion of 'the imaginal body' that provides individuals with a 'a whole range of experiences' and 'multifarious potentials' (Samuels, *ibid.* p 217).

The clients from my dramatherapy clinical work, whose self-presentations contained indicators of both male and female gender behaviours alongside each other, as well as those people featured in the BBC's Q.E.D programme *Sex Acts* mentioned above (p29), expressed ambivalence towards presenting continuous male or female gender behaviours and also towards transexuality (in the sense that this term means undertaking gender

re-assignment surgery) which would take them towards a position of *gender certainty*. Viewed from Grosz's perspective they can be seen 'to play with a number of different sexualities but *not take on the body and sex of the other*' (*ibid.* p 77, my italics). They were taking gender transgressive positions, acting from a position of non-conformity to the male-female gender binary, choosing to identify with a kind of *gender fluidity*, with a greater degree of flexibility than is available within the binary of the male-female gender system. I, also, understand the positions taken by these individuals to fall within the scope of Samuels' 'multifarious potentials' (*ibid.*) which are already present but not validated within the binary system of gender, which is in place to serve the interests of what Butler has called 'the institution of compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, *ibid.* p23).

### **Gender Fluidity as liminal and/or liminoid phenomenon**

In *Gender Outlaw*, Kate Bornstein distinguishes between *gender ambiguity*, the 'refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code', and *gender fluidity*, the 'refusal to remain one gender or another, the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change' (Bornstein, 1994 p 52). In the sense that 'gender ambiguity' and 'gender fluidity' are positions that present an agenda of shifting, transitional identity in terms of the male/female gender binary, they invite scrutiny within the context of liminality. Insofar as individuals such as my dramatherapy clients are living 'in between' genders and these performers are presenting images that embody this sense of in-betweenness, these images suggest another discussion, beyond Bornstein's, which may be particularly helpful: Victor Turner's discussion of the liminal and the liminoid. In *The Ritual Process* (1969) Turner says:

The attributes of liminality or liminal personae are... necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.

(Turner, 1966 p 95)

Turner also distinguishes between the term 'liminal' and 'liminoid' phenomena:

Liminal phenomena tend to be collective, concerned with calendrical, meteorological, biological or social-structural cycles and rhythms....Liminoid phenomena develop most characteristically outside the central economic and political processes.... Liminoid phenomena being produced by specific named individuals or particular groups, 'schools', 'coteries' tend to be more idiosyncratic and quirky than liminal phenomena... Liminoid phenomena are not merely reversible, they are often subversive, representing radical critiques of the central structure and proposing alternative models. (Turner cited in Bristol, 1985 p38)

Since the term 'liminal' was derived by Arnold van Gennep (1960) from the Latin *limen*, meaning 'threshold', it has been used to describe states and periods that are transitional *rites de passage*, as well as those which are not 'assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial'. In presenting the difference between the properties of liminality and those of the status system, Turner (*ibid.*) presents a range of binary oppositions in which he includes 'transition/state'; 'homogeneity/heterogeneity'; 'equality/inequality'; 'sexual continence/sexuality' and so on. He presents a list of attributes with which liminality is associated including 'death', 'being in the womb', 'invisibility', 'bisexuality', 'darkness', 'the wilderness' and 'an eclipse of the sun or moon'. It is arguable that these qualities can be seen not as 'in between' states but as aspects of various binaries. Death may well be considered to be a transition/threshold but can also be held as one end of a binary that is 'life/death' or as the part of the pairing 'birth/death' where 'birth' is the commencement and 'death' the cessation of life or any other process. Invisibility can also be read as the binary

pairing to visibility ( the ‘in between’ state being *partial visibility*) just as darkness could be part of the binary light/darkness. In each of these cases, Turner can be said to have taken one aspect of these binaries - life/death, visibility/invisibility and light/darkness - and suggested that the selected aspect of the binary has associations with ‘liminality’.

Turner mentions bisexuality as a quality that is ‘frequently linked’ to liminality (*ibid.* p95). It is tempting to see ambiguous gender transgressive positions as liminal, being associated with bisexuality - if bisexuality is regarded as an ambivalent position between two categories of sexuality. Turner does not specifically include the ‘hermaphrodite’ or the ‘androgynous’ as an example of a liminal position within the male/female binary in his list of attributes associated with liminality. However, in that my dramatherapy clients and the images embodied by these performers express positions that are ‘between genders’ they could be seen as slipping ‘through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space’ (Turner, *ibid.*). They present a ‘shape-shifting’ agenda which could be viewed as ‘transitional’ in that they resist fixing on either one of the terms of the male/female binary and so could be associated with ‘transition’ in Turner’s binary ‘transition/state’. However, with the exception of Kate Bornstein’s, the expressed agenda of these performers is not that of the pre-operative transsexual who seeks to move towards a sense of gender certainty via recourse to gender re-assignment surgery, for instance, and who may be seen as being located in an ‘in-between’ space which is also a ‘threshold’ between one form of gender identity, the body shape of which s/he is leaving behind, and another, for which s/he has not yet obtained the body shape. In this sense, where gender is seen to be firmly linked to anatomy, these performers do not occupy a

liminal space between male and female *bodies*. They are all either bodily male or female who identify with positions of gender ambiguity and gender fluidity and/or who embody these images in their work.

I would, here, illustrate the distinction I am making between the 'liminal' and the 'liminoid' by comparing the gender ambiguous position represented by the so-called hermaphrodite individual who seeks to make constructed anatomical changes to his/her body in order to reach an eventual position of some kind of gender certainty and who is gender ambiguous either by circumstances of anatomical structure, questionable gender attribution at birth etc. and the gender fluid, gender transgressive positions taken by individuals such as my dramatherapy clients and embodied in the work of these performers. The former can be said to be located in a 'no man's land' of gender, albeit anatomically defined, without his/her *deliberate intention* to be so and, therefore, may be associated with the liminal. The latter may be anatomically categorizable as 'belonging' to one or the other gender but *intentionally* choose to transgress the rules of gender by playing with the stereotypic indicators of both genders and so resist fixing on either one of the terms of the heterosexual male/female binary as well as on the derivations of these terms of the binary as they may exist within what they see as the gay and lesbian neo-orthodoxy. This intention, I am arguing, would bring them closer to the liminoid. However, they are presenting images that embody this shape-shifting sense of in-betweenness and ambiguity which is associated with the liminal. I consider them to be examples of the liminoid appearing within a liminal context. Turner, himself, distinguishes liminoid phenomena from the liminal by the liminoid's tendency to be more 'idiosyncratic and quirky'. Whereas 'liminal personae' are socially licensed,

liminoid resistance or rebellion has a more subversive quality, ‘ representing radical critiques’ and ‘proposing alternative models’ (*ibid.* p 38). Since liminoid rebellion is unlicensed it is more closely associated with individual actions of non-compliance and dissent than liminal rebellion though it can be seen to appear within a liminal context. The usefulness of Turner’s distinction between the ‘liminal’ and the ‘liminoid’ to this project is that it affords a frame within which the gender transgressive strategies in these performances can be examined as to the extent to which they are simply expressive of ‘ambiguous identity’ and are socially licensed (liminal) and the extent to which this transgression of the ‘rules’ of gender is deliberate and intentionally subversive (liminoid); they can be seen to be liminoid within the context of the liminal. The extent to which these performers can be associated with the liminal and the liminoid would also be useful in foregrounding my exploration, in later chapters of this study, of the extent to which they can be seen to relate to carnival which is itself a performance form that has been associated with liminality and liminoidity.

In *The Ritual Process* (1969) Turner presents an aspect of liminality that he calls ‘the powers of the weak’. He contrasts the ‘liminality of the strong with that of the permanently weak’ where the liminality of the weak ‘represents a fantasy of structural superiority’ involving the ‘make-believe elevation of the ritual subjects to positions of eminent authority’. He cites the attention that writers like Max Gluckman paid to the role of medieval court jesters who were ‘usually men of low class’ given licence to joke at the expense of royalty and members of the aristocracy, ‘institutionalized jokers’ who were able to give voice to the feelings of the people in social/political systems that tended to lack other means of checks and balances on powerful and important people.

Turner calls this ‘the powers of the weak’ and it is tempting to see a relationship between this concept and the positions assumed by gender transgressive performers. However, Bornstein, whose gender transgressive work is rooted in her own life experiences as a transgendered woman, has a declared agenda that ‘subscribes to a dynamic of change, outside any given dichotomy....to point a way out of struggle....by raising questions and implicating people’ (*ibid.* p97)). The concept of ‘struggle’ implies a process of empowerment that is actively sought, an attempt not only to refuse the male-female binary but to change it. This deliberate choice to subvert and radically critique the heterosexual hegemony and the male-female binary relates Bornstein’s position to the liminoid. There is a suggestion inherent in Bornstein’s statements that the dichotomy itself is a form of the institutionalized oppression by one class of people, males and females who are certain about gender, of another class, who are either uncertain or choose to identify outside the binary. Bornstein writes in the language of political revolution, referring to her work as having cultural and historical links with the ‘theater of the oppressed, the theater of the absurd and revolutionary theater.....The theater that has risen up in the face of oppression’ (*ibid.* p164). She has, therefore, a transformational agenda which, in Turner’s sense of ‘the powers of the weak’, seeks to give voice to the feelings of the people in social and political systems. However, her position is not that of the ‘institutionalized fool’ and she presents a radical critique of the gender system that is seen as being central to the heterosexual hegemony. This would bring her position closer to the liminoid. There is also the assumption of a transformational agenda, evidenced by the words of Robert O’Neill Crossman/Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye in the interview in Part One, and is also present in the Manifesto and enactments of the Order of Perpetual

Indulgence. Mother Lubricious says that the Sisters are ‘challenging ego’, have a function which is ‘to spread Universal Joy and expiate Stigmatic Guilt’ by talking to the ‘Gathered Faithful’. They are ‘male nuns’ who are referred to as ‘Sisters’ because ‘nuns are very powerful people’ and because of the ‘thing about masculine and feminine and the undermining of it all’ (p87).

I would argue that this position seeks to go further than Turner’s notion in that neither Bornstein nor Mother Lubricious see themselves as ‘institutionalized jokers’. I believe there is a sense here, with the gender transgressive position and the work of people like Bornstein, of there being a struggle with the authority that is perceived and experienced as residing in the institutions of the heterosexual hegemony itself, that is seen as perpetuating the male-female binary. It is in the ‘compulsory’ nature of what Butler calls ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (*ibid.*) in the interests of which the male-female binary is perpetuated that gender transgressive individuals and exponents of gender transgressive performance, such as Bornstein, seem to perceive and experience a ‘lack of checks and balances’ (Turner, *ibid.*). There is no place for those who do not conform except to be categorized as ‘queer’, as ‘freaks’ or as ‘outlaws’ of some kind or the other. In this sense, then, gender transgressive performance can be seen as attempting to provide an arena for those individuals who are experiencing a sense of oppression and, therefore, may be likened to Turner’s ‘liminality of the weak’. However, as it seeks to go *beyond* this, to challenge and *subvert* the existing gender system wherein the authority and ‘power of the strong’ is seen to reside, it is *liminoid*.

Bornstein says that her vision of theatre

could also be called Theater of the Third Space, and it would include members of any borderline community or non-community; it would include anyone who falls through the cracks of the cultural floorboards; it would include anyone who challenges a cultural binary; it would include anyone who is Other. (Bornstein, *ibid.* p164)

Here, I would argue that Bornstein presents a kind of melting-pot of inclusiveness that serves to confuse rather than clarify her transformational agenda. If the arena is for anyone 'who falls through the cracks of the cultural floorboards' it is not clear what the transformational agenda involves. This gives rise to a number of questions: Is it an arena for permanent dissent? What would be the function of the 'Theater of the Third Space' if all marginalized groups and individuals had unlimited access within the various media, for instance? Does her transformational agenda contain a utopian vision in which any sense of difference - 'Otherness' - has ceased? Or is she proposing a level of freedom that Roland Barthes calls 'a luxury which every society should afford its citizens: as many languages as there are desires - a utopian proposition in that no society is yet ready to admit the plurality of desire...that a language, whatever it be, not repress another; that the subject may know without remorse, without repression, the bliss of having at his disposal two kinds of language; that he may speak this or that, according to his perversions, not according to the Law'(1984, p467)?

Bornstein also identifies herself and other people who are transgressive, either with respect to gender or sexuality, as having a cultural kinship with shamans, jokers and jesters.

Lesbians, gay men, transgendered folks, S/Mers all trace their roots to early culture's shamanic rituals of transformation.... the healers, the mystics, the channelers of truth of their time. They were the tricksters, the jokers, the jesters and the poets; they were the whores and the priestesses. (Bornstein, *ibid.* p157)

Here, again, there is an inclusiveness given to the sense of 'queerness' that also attaches to the use of the term 'queer' in the work of other Queer performers and theorists as a kind of 'rainbow flag' umbrella term which I shall be dealing with the following chapter. However, there is an identification with jokers and jesters as well as with shamanic healers and mystics, 'channelers of truth'. Mother Lubricious also identifies the work of the Sisters as if it were a Mission to go 'amongst the Gathered Faithful' who is 'anyone who isn't a nun'. She refers to the Sisters as 'Holy Fools' and their public appearances as 'Holy Theatre' like the 'Medieval Feast of Fools and Mystery Plays'. In doing so Mother Lubricious takes a position that is relatable to Turner's 'liminality of the weak' that presents a 'fantasy of structural superiority' involving the 'make-believe elevation of the ritual subjects to positions of eminent authority'.

Bornstein's is arguably a 'romantic' claim full of visionary rhetoric. While performers in drag (such as Lily Savage) and gay male TV personalities (such as Julian Clary) may be considered to function as 'licensed fools' and 'institutionalized jokers' thereby being relatable to Turner's sense of the liminal and 'powers of the weak', neither Bornstein nor Mother Lubricious see themselves as 'institutionalized' jokers. I would argue that they go further than Turner's notion. It would be difficult to maintain that gender transgressive individuals occupy social positions similar to the *berdaches* in Native American culture where women who assumed male roles or men who assumed female roles were given special ceremonial status within the tribe (Miller, 1995) or the *hijras* in India who are transsexuals and/or individuals who might be designated as 'transgendered'. The *hijra* community is a group of interlocking matriarchal, ecumenical and communal religious and social orders. Identified as neither male nor

female, the *hijra* has a traditionally accepted role at religious ceremonies, festivals and events, dancing and performing at births and weddings, and imbued with the ‘power’ to bless infants, mothers and brides thus ensuring fertility in some areas of South India (Nanda, 1990). Both the *berdache* and the *hijra* are considered as ‘special people’ within their respective cultures and are accorded statuses akin to shamans. They can be considered to occupy liminal positions within the accepted boundaries and also to be relatable to Turner’s ‘powers of the weak’ by their elevation (however prescribed and limited) as ritual subjects at events that themselves are liminal by nature - births, marriages, festivals and fairs. Some gay and lesbian writers have identified with both *berdaches* and *hijras* in their accounts of Queer history. However, while the *berdaches* and the *hijras* occupy positions within their respective cultures and do not actively seek to subvert the central structures of those societies, the gender transgressive individuals and performers with whom I am dealing *do* actively seek to do so. They present at different times

- a) images of fluidity between genders and sexualities
- b) performed expressions of non-compliance with and refutation of the rules of male-female gender binary itself
- c) the expressed intention to undermine and subvert the gender system which is seen as being in place to serve the interests of the heterosexual hegemony.

These three aspects bring their positions closer to liminoid than the liminal. Bornstein expressly states the subversive, liminoid nature of her work. By entitling her book *Gender Outlaw* (*ibid.*), she explicitly links her position with

the concept of the outlaw who subscribes to a dynamic of change, outside any given dichotomy....to point a way out of struggle....by raising questions and implicating people. (Bornstein, *ibid.* p97)

The role of the 'outlaw' is one that is, quite literally, outside the law, where the rules of the binary do not apply. The position is taken intentionally in order to refuse the binary, the 'struggle' being to go beyond the binary, the 'given dichotomy'.

Not all the performers in this study are as explicit or as intentionally political in their work as Bornstein or the Sisters. Exponents of gender transgressive performance cannot be described as a 'group' or a 'school' or a 'coterie', as there are a number of situations of social dissonance between them. While their positions may be regarded as something more fundamental than 'quirky' or 'idiosyncratic', they are certainly subversive and present radical critiques and alternative models of gender and sexuality to the dominant hegemonies and as far as they do this intentionally and freely seeking to break the gender boundaries they can be considered to be liminoid. The most fundamental position taken by these individuals and performers in their critiques of the gender system is that of gender fluidity. However, while they seek to embody positions outside the boundaries of what is culturally acceptable and conventional, they utilize aspects of stereotypical gender role, behavior and images at various times in order to manifest this fluidity and non-compliance. There is a fundamental acknowledgment of the conventional male-female gender code which is, then, transgressed or denied by a variety of performance strategies that involve playing with gender.

The embodiment of this fluidity between genders can be seen in Ivan Cartwright's autobiographical performance *It Took More Than One Man* (p124). Cartwright enacts the changes in his social, sexual and gender identities, from his struggle with socially prescribed maleness through his gender-change procedure and his identity as

‘Marianne’ back to a different kind of maleness, to ‘the kind of man that I am, the Queen that I am’. Cartwright’s label ‘Queen’ describes the position of a biological male refusing to conform to the qualities of ‘maleness’ in his social and sexual roles but, at the same time, choosing not to ‘become a woman’ nor to behave, dress or present as a woman. It is not a position of ambiguity somewhere between male and female, such as ‘hermaphrodite’, nor is it a position that represents an integration of the male and female, such as ‘androgynous’. It is the position that rejects the categories of the binary and, as such, it is, arguably, *beyond* the male-female binary of institutionalized heterosexuality. However, in order to reject the binary and present a position outside it, Cartwright needs to utilize *stereotypical* indicators of both poles of the gender binary *at the same time*: a ‘male’ name ‘Ivan’; a ‘male’ body (no breasts and with a penis) clothed in a ‘glamorous’, ‘feminine’ dress; dark nail varnish on long, extended false finger nails; a long curly haired wig which he removes at one point in his performance to show his closely-shaven head (androgynous) and then replaces with another long curly haired wig. When he does all this within his performance Cartwright is embodying the process of ‘gender fluidity’ by playing with stereotypical gender indicators in order to present his refusal of the male-female gender code and establish his self-acclaimed transgressive category ‘Queen’. This sense of play can be seen as liminoid in that he is breaking the rules for his own self-empowering purposes.

This sense of playing with gender in order to present a gender fluid position can also be seen in Michael Topping’s performances as Malitza who, Topping says, is not so much a ‘character’ as an aspect of himself. The persona of ‘Malitza’ is an amalgamation of elements from his own and from Militza Korjus’ personal histories (p66). When he

plays 'Malitza', Topping is 'being the middle-aged woman part' of himself. He sees it as an expression of that femininity which is inside himself and distinguishes between this and the 'phallic nature' that tends to characterize drag. He says,

A lot of drag queens do the opposite. They seem to express their masculinity through the frock, through the drag. They tend to become very aggressive. I don't. (p67)

Topping does not consider that he is cross-dressing as Malitza and identifies the clothes he wears everyday as potential components of what he might wear in performance:

I mean, this top I'm wearing now could easily be something I may throw on. Am I cross-dressing now? I don't think so. I'm merely wearing these clothes and they happen to be women's trousers and - look at my feet, I mean...I'd put on the make-up and the wig, perhaps, for the show but I'm not really cross-dressing as such. (p69)

While Topping and Cartwright may be seen to embody gender fluidity in their performances, non-compliance with the gender system can be demonstrated in the performances of The Divine David. He declares this non-compliance directly in performance by denying the language of gender difference and rejecting the gender categories themselves. In his performance, The Divine David refutes the importance of gender categories by reducing the concept of gender to basic genital structures (p97), just as he takes the audience to the ultimate negation of physical life itself by saying, with a mischievous gurgling sound, '....you're all going to die!'. His repetition of this ultimate state of affairs, death, serves to enhance what can be seen, on the one hand, as merely an anarchistic-nihilistic statement, but on the other hand, as a performance strategy to reduce the importance of gender difference to hubris.

He also mocks the rules of normative gender behaviour when he selects a man in a

sports suit from the audience and, with an air of feigned naivety, asks whether the name 'UMBRO' on his chest is the man's name. The audience laugh in complicity with his mockery as they recognize that to be the name of a firm that manufactures sportswear. By suggesting that the sportswear manufacturer's name might be the man's own name, he links the man's image to stereotypical 'masculine' clothes and then continues his mockery by the exaggerated 'clowning' with the word 'SPORTS'. In this series of acts The Divine David has selected a man presenting an image from the male term of the binary, humiliated him and commented on the ridiculousness of the 'male' image, linking that ridiculousness to the fact that sportswear is being worn not for sport but for an evening's visit to his performance. He is also making a comment about fashion, which traditionally serves the interest of the binary. He preserves the ambiguity of his sexuality and his gender while *playing* with the indicators of both genders. By placing the word 'Divine' before the male name 'David', he invites association with 'Divine', the transgender performer of Andy Warhol's films, as well as with a distancing from normal, everyday reality which, of course, is not divine but mundane. By insisting on emphasizing the word 'the' preceding his name, 'THE Divine David' (p96), he is associating with a sense of the unique. By referring to his performances as being 'at the CUTTING EDGE of the *avant garde*' he uses rhetoric to 'send-up' the *avant garde* while, at the same time, inviting association with the experimental, the uncharted and the potentially subversive. The Divine David's performance *persona* may be considered to be liminoid in that his identifications are not easily contained within existing social prescriptions and conditions, even those of the ordered alternative gay and lesbian cultures, and that this is his expressed intention. Everything is 'up for grabs', as it were, including language. In a sense, it is tempting to turn to Chassegeut-

Smirgal's Freudian analysis of 'perversion' (Chassegeut-Smirgal, *ibid.*) and see The Divine David's gender transgressive performance as an embodiment of that 'perversion'.

Also, because his performances embody that which cannot be clearly classified in terms of the traditional criteria of classification, they can be regarded as belonging with those phenomena that Mary Douglas (1966) has called 'polluting' and 'dangerous' to the establishment.

A similar refutation of the gender categories and maintenance of a position of gender fluidity is found in the work of The Order of Perpetual Indulgence. The Order's Manifesto (p79) states that its mission, amongst other things, is an 'antidote to the oppressive effects of gender roles and behaviour forced upon women and men' which the sisters and brothers commit themselves to carry out by 'the wearing of the Habit and the perpetration of their presence wherever and whenever possible' (p79). This 'habitual manifestation', as it is called in the Order's Manifesto, is referred to informally as 'manifesting in *nunsona*'. Robert O'Neill Crossman, Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look aka Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye, expresses this gender transgressive position by disassociating what he does from transvestite cross-dressing or transsexual drag:

Well, no, a tranny is going out in drag. I'm just putting my habit on because I AM A NUN. I'm not a pretend nun. I am a male nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest. (p85)

and

I'm not 'presenting' as a woman. I am a gay male nun, a Queer Nun. For me, there is no difference. (p292)

Here again, as with Cartwright and Topping, the rejection of gender categorization and the retention of a position of gender fluidity is achieved by *playing* with both male and female gender indicators, placing them side by side, identifying as being both a male and a nun, which is traditionally a female status. The biological gender status of the individual becomes irrelevant as female members of the Order also identify as ‘gay male nuns’ or ‘brothers’. It is important to the Sisters that they are not seen as men in drag but as ‘nuns’ while at the same time they refuse to use the female pronoun when referring to each other:

Some of the Sisters are very strong about that. They won’t allow men to call each other ‘she’. They insist on being called ‘he’....It’s the gay maleness of the nun-ness, if we can say that. I don’t mind being called ‘she’ but some nuns would insist on being called ‘he’. I don’t give a shite myself. (p292)

The nun who is in ‘habitual manifestation’ is, in a sense, performing as an actor would perform a role, but is also considered to undergo a form of ‘ego loss’ in that his/her ‘secular identity’ merges with or is subordinated to her/his ‘nunsona’. However, the process is more than that of a performer taking on a character/role in a play. An actor playing Macbeth may identify with Macbeth, or Charles Ludlam ‘becoming’ Camille may identify with Camille for the duration of the performance. There is not necessarily any acknowledged or identified merging of the actor’s existential circumstances with those of the character s/he may be playing. Their personal histories and narratives tend to remain separate histories and narratives. Fiona Shaw playing Richard II may bring into focus sexual, cultural and, arguably, political nuances and qualities in the character of Richard because Shaw is a female actor, but Richard does not ‘become’ a woman because the part is played by a woman. Nor, had Shaw been pregnant during the period

of performance, would the script have incorporated a pregnancy for Richard. Robert O'Neill Crossman's need to have a colostomy bag, however, becomes incorporated into his 'nunsona' Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye, and becomes an integral element in that nun's performance and 'manifestation':

...I lose being Robert and I become Mother Lubricious or Sister Kiss My Arse Goodbye, which was my previous name.....I had to have a colostomy bag. I thought it was a good idea to recognize it in nunsona. I think some people think I'm performing and those are the people who challenge and get a bit negative and start having a go.... (p85)

Michael Topping's background is 'common' and Militza Korjus was 'the daughter of a Countess, Russian-Polish' so Malitza becomes 'half-common, half-refined'. Michael was brought out of the shadows of retirement into performing and is 'sort of reluctantly being there'. The same qualities are incorporated into Malitza. It is as if Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye and Malitza, created and portrayed by Robert O'Neill Crossman and Michael Topping, are liminal to the extent that they have an existence in a space somewhere between the actual personal realities of Crossman and Topping and the non-real world of fiction/fantasy. However, as far as both Topping and Crossman intentionally set out to critique the gender system I consider their positions to be liminoid.

### **Gender fluidity and the Binary**

I have so far been examining gender fluidity in the work of these performers' likening their subversive strategic positions to liminoid phenomena. I believe that there may also be a useful understanding of these strategies from a perspectival shift in which they can be viewed as replacing the male-female binary with other binaries such as

‘gender/no gender’ or ‘transgression/conformity’. With regard to the binary ‘gender/no gender’ it is tempting to identify this transgressive position with the term ‘no gender’. However, the very ‘play’ itself relies on the stereotypical indicators of the two genders as they are specified currently and historically within the attributed gender code, so that there is of necessity a degree of identification with the stereotypes of gender. The use of ‘glamorous’ dresses/’dowdy dresses’ (Dave Lynn, Malitza, Ivan Cartwright), show-girl make-up/beard showing through make-up (Divine Feud/Malitza), nun’s habits, female names (‘Mother’, ‘Sister’, ‘Titti’, ‘Lizzie’), references to ‘femme, lip-stick lesbian’ images/ ‘butch, non-girlie’ lesbian images (Amy Lamé), the use of symbols of male sexuality - ‘peacock’/ female sexuality - ‘oysters’ (Doo Cot, Marissa Carr) - all demonstrate the acknowledgement of two genders and the appropriation of the existing indicators of those two genders within the images presented. Such appropriation is necessary to the strategies employed. However, none of these individuals are *denying* gender. Their positions are ‘fluid’ in the sense that they use the stereotypical indicators of gender from a position of transgression, not in order to deny gender but to maintain what Andrew Samuels has described as ‘multifarious potentials that are not yet available’ (Samuels, 1990 p217). In Grosz’s terms they can be seen as exercising their ‘capacity to.....play with, become, a number of different sexualities’ (*ibid.* p77). In doing this their position is in between ‘gender’ and ‘no gender’. In that they are choosing to do this *freely* and *deliberately*, I see them as being liminoid.

In regard to the binary ‘transgression/conformity’, again, it is tempting to identify them with the term ‘transgression’ with which by, their gender fluid, non-conforming agenda they identify. However, their transgressive positions depend on the utilization of the

stereotypical indicators of gender. The theatrical modes of performance through which they work seem to necessitate the use of heightened, over-the-top images relatable to the carnivalesque and the grotesque placing upon them the demands that arise from the dilemma of presenting gender stereotypical images in performance while at the same embodying in their performances a challenge to the very gender system from which these stereotypes historically arise. This results in the use of 'glamorous'/ 'dowdy' images of the female, 'femme, lipstick lesbian' images/ 'butch, non-girlie' images which have little bearing on the reality of the term 'female' in the gender binary or 'lesbian' in terms of sexuality but which are employed as performance strategies in order to comment on and undermine the social stereotypes that are perceived by these performers to arise from the social roles and behaviour that are traditionally attributed to the terms 'male' and 'female'. As their positions are not simply identifiable with 'transgression' but also, to some degree, with 'conformity', they cannot be clearly identified with either term of the binary 'transgression/conformity' and so can be seen to occupy a fluid or liminal position within this binary. Insofar as they are freely intending to do so their position can be identified as liminoid.

I feel it is useful now to consider the extent to which Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist approach to binaries may facilitate further understanding of the strategies employed by these performers in relation to the male-female binary.

Deconstructive reading argues that in any binary pairing, such as male/female, the first term is the privileged term which depends for its identity on the exclusion of the other or secondary term but that the primacy belongs to the secondary or subordinate term.

Derrida (1976) maintains that it is not enough simply to neutralize the binary oppositions of metaphysics. Deconstruction involves both reversal and displacement. One of the terms controls the other, holding the superior position. To overthrow this hierarchical situation the 'superior' term must be displaced or put 'under erasure'. In the translator's preface to Derrida's *On Grammatology* (1976) Gayatri Spivak says that deconstruction attempts to

locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier, to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle it in order to reconstitute what is already inscribed. (*ibid.* p lxxvii)

Following Derrida's argument, each binarial term, such as 'male', is separated from the other, 'female', by some limit, frame or boundary but he maintains that no border is guaranteed, no frame is fixed. This results in not being able to fix any meaning on any term or frame. Everything then becomes a matter of interpretation. Every position or text tends to deconstruction and the process is endless. Deconstruction, seeking to disarticulate traditional concepts such as 'author', 'history' and 'tradition' emphasizes in their place the 'reader', and 'intertextuality'. This presents a shift from 'identities' to 'differences' from 'unities' to 'fragmentations'. The concept of a single, unified self is replaced with a many aspected play of selves, as it were. If everything then becomes interpretation and identities are differences that are formulated via a series of performative acts, then the ambivalent positions taken by individuals like my dramatherapy clients, Rachel O'Connor, Zoltar Kattse and Christie Elan-Cane featured in the BBC's programme *Sex Acts* and embodied in the images in the work of these performers, are positions where the 'meaning' is 'undecidable' and subject to interpretation. The self-presence of these individuals and performers as 'speaking

subjects' and their 'texts' or 'voiced signs', the positions, are questioned and the notion of the male-female gender binary itself deconstructed. The entire question then becomes: why is 'gender' an issue at all? While I am aware that the metaphysical approach of deconstructionist theory is useful in questioning basic assumptions regarding 'identity' and 'gender', this is not my central concern. My interests in this study as a dramatherapist are the clients' own identifications with gender identities and behaviour derived from the opposite biological gender to their own, their ambivalence towards changing their anatomical gender, their employment of gender transgressive/gender fluid positions in their self-representations which consist of utilizing stereotypical indicators of both genders at the same time, the extent to which these positions are embodied in the work of performers, some of whom, themselves, identify with gender transgressive/gender fluid positions in their own identities and/or employ these images in performance and the extent to which these images relate to carnival and the Grotesque.

### **Summary**

Having presented, at the commencement of this chapter, the notions and theories surrounding gender identity and gender itself, I have distinguished between the concepts of gender ambiguity and gender fluidity as two positions within gender transgression, which were maintained by people with whom I had undertaken dramatherapy clinical work and also by individuals such as those who were featured in the BBC Q.E.D programme *Sex Acts*, as an oppositional stance to the existing roles and behaviour available within the male-female binary.

I have proposed that the positions of gender ambiguity and gender fluidity maintained by these individuals were also present in the work of some of these performers and have suggested that as they were seeking to embody gender transgressive positions that were, in a sense, in-between genders, they could be considered to be liminal and/or liminoid. In order to foreground the later part of my study, in which I will examine the extent to which these performances are relatable to carnival and the 'carnavalesque', performance forms that can be relatable to liminality/liminoidity, I have considered the extent to which these gender transgressive positions may be considered to be liminal/ liminoid, with reference to Turner's model of liminality. I have proposed, by looking at the strategies by which these performers play with the indicators of both male and female genders and thus present a 'shape-shifting' agenda, that as far as they are intentionally and freely choosing to break the 'rules' of the binary they are demonstrably liminoid.

I have also briefly examined the gender transgressive strategies of these individuals and performers from a perspectival shift by which I have suggested they can be viewed as replacing the male-female binary with other binaries such as 'gender/no gender' or 'transgression/conformity' and have concluded that in relation to these binaries their positions could also be considered to partake of the nature of the liminoid. I have followed this by considering the conclusion to which the deconstructionist approach to binaries might lead in considering the strategies employed by these performers in relation to the male-female binary. I now wish, in the next chapter, to pursue my exploration of these gender transgressive performers' work, together with the related notions of gender ambiguity and gender fluidity, an exploration of the term 'queer' and the extent to which the work of these performers can be considered to be Queer

performance.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **QUEER, QUEER THEORY AND QUEER PERFORMANCE**

As the transgression of the boundaries and rules of gender, together with the shifting into and out of male and female gender roles and gender cues that is characteristic of gender ambiguity and gender fluidity, has been closely associated with the notion of Queerness, I intend in this chapter to look at the meanings and nuances given to the term 'queer', seeking to distinguish between its use and appropriation by individuals and movements within identity politics and its implications within Queer Theory. I will follow this with a consideration of the extent to which the work of the performers in this study may be considered as examples of Queer performance.

#### **Queer and Queer Theory**

The evolutionary history of the word 'queer' has taken it on a long journey from its traditional meaning as being 'out of the usual manner', 'strange' and 'odd', when it was used to describe individuals, feelings and conditions that were perceived or experienced as being 'strange' or 'odd', being equally applicable to an 'eccentric' personality as to a sensation of physical discomfort. Along with 'freak' and 'pervert' it was part of derogatory name-calling that was used against homosexual or bisexual, transvestite or transsexual, men and women.

From the mid-eighties onwards the term came to be gradually used by gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender men and women in a somewhat localized and haphazard manner that depended on individual and local group perception until activists of 'ACT-UP', a provocatively situationist gay and lesbian organization, formed 'QUEER

NATION' in 1990. Adopting the slogan, 'We're here. We're Queer. Get used to it!', QUEER NATION's agenda was aggressive and confrontational, including, amongst other elements, the re-appropriation of the word 'queer' as a positive indicator of self-acclamation. The word began to develop an inclusive sense when the radical movement for gay and lesbian rights actively began to add the categories 'bisexual' and 'transgender' to 'gay and lesbian' in the early 1990s. With the inclusion of these two categories, the word started to take on a significance beyond the gay and lesbian re-appropriation of it and it became a 'catch-all', what I would refer to as a rainbow flag, umbrella term, for all the various culturally marginalized sexual self-identifications and sub-cultures that constitute what can broadly be described as 'Queer culture'.

The term 'queer' was also used to describe a theoretical model that developed out of the consolidation of gay and lesbian studies within universities. As the term 'queer' evolved to a position of non-alignment with any *specific* identity category, it could be annexed to any number of discourses. The implications of the meaning of the term 'queer' were far from clear. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis was the first theorist to suggest, in *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, that Queer Theory is 'another way of thinking the sexual' (de Lauretis, 1991, p iv). In *Troubleshooters: Simon Watney on Outing*, (1991), Watney identified 'queer' as a label of generational significance employed by younger gay men and women seeking to distant themselves from what they perceived to be the rapid middle-class *embourgeoisement* of the gay and lesbian communities and also to distinguish between those men and women who 'came out' before the onset of AIDS and those who came out after it. I would argue that Watney's argument was fundamentally based on class rather than on sex or gender, that it took a

unified view of the term 'gay and lesbian' and applied that same unified view to an assumed 'gay and lesbian' lifestyle that was seen to be shared by all gay men and women over a certain age.

By the mid-1990s the use of the word 'queer' did not signify any specific biological sex, anatomical structure, sexual preference or identity but described those behaviours, positions and analytical models that focus on the incoherence within what is traditionally held to be the stable relations between biological sex, anatomical gender, sexual desire and social behaviour. While it is still closely associated with gay and lesbian 'issues', its framework also includes cross-dressing, gender ambiguity, transexuality (in the sense in which this includes gender re-assignment surgery). In this sense, the term 'queer' is used to locate and exploit the incoherence within the elements that are perceived to stabilize the heterosexual values of the dominant hegemonies. It is in this light that I identified the positions and strategies employed by my drama therapy clients and these performers as being 'queer', irrespective of the *specific* self-identification or sub-culture with which the individual or performer might identify or be identified.

The term 'queer' becomes an integral term in Queer Theory, which focuses on the deconstruction of stable sexes, genders and sexualities. While 'queer' is not used as a mere elaboration on the term 'gay and lesbian', Queer Theory developed, arguably, out of the lesbian and gay re-working of the post-structuralists' ideas of 'identity' as being unfixed, changing, multiple and unstable. However, it would be erroneous to think that Queer Theory and gay and lesbian study are synonymous. In fact, Queer Theory, in its

debunking of notions of stable sexes, genders and sexualities, offers a critique of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as stable identities in themselves..

Michael Wilson, in his lecture at the Catalyst Arts Centre in Belfast entitled *Rehearsals towards any future performance that would be-Queer*(1995), states that among the various meanings of the word ‘queer’ is its meaning as the verb ‘to queer’, signifying ‘to spoil’ or ‘to put out of order’. For an answer to the question ‘What is being put out of order in this case?’ we can turn to Moe Meyer’s offering that ‘the queer label contains a critique of a vast and comprehensive system of class-based practices of which sex/gender identity is only a part’ (Meyer, 1994 p3), that the notion of Queer spoils or seeks to put out of order the system whereby identity is determined and shaped by the dominant concepts of sexual orientation. Queer Theory is also, as Stephen Whittle says in *Gender Fucking, or Fucking Gender*, a ‘theoretical attempt to deconstruct the gendered and sexed praxis of academia’ (in Ekins and King, 1995 p202). By its attempt to remove the stabilizing frames of social and sexual identity, Queer Theory replaces notions of the Self as being unique, abiding and continuous with the notion of the Self as being performative, and of social identities being signified by enactments, embodiments, gestures and so forth, which would be improvisational and discontinuous by nature and instituted by repetitive and stylized acts. Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw* (1995), adopts the gender deconstructionist agenda which is expressed in the language of revolutionary politics. She identifies ‘left and right wings of the gender discourse’ and adds that:

Any revolution in deconstructing gender should look for *no* support among communities of people whose identities depend on the existence of this bi-polar

gender system. This would include...the fundamentalist right wing purists in the lesbian and gay male communities who believe in the ultimate goal of assimilation into the dominant culture. (Bornstein, *ibid.* p132)

By 1995, then, the meaning of the term 'queer', through its implication in Queer Theory, has acquired more than one sense. As Meyer says, Queer

indicates an ontological challenge to the dominant labelling philosophies especially the medicalization of the subject implied by the word 'homosexual' as well as a challenge to discrete gender categories embedded in the divided phrase 'gay and lesbian'. (*ibid.* p1)

The terms 'gay men', 'lesbian women', 'transgendered males or females', 'drag queens', 'drag kings' are all seen as categories deriving from the very gender system that Queer Theory is involved in deconstructing and destabilizing. By 1994, de Lauretis had already, in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, distanced herself from Queer Theory, disclaiming the term as having been appropriated by forces and institutions that it was seeking to oppose. By proposing a challenge to the notion of 'fixed identity', Queer Theory problematizes even the general use of the terms 'woman' and 'man' or any other group - 'gay men', 'lesbian women', 'transgendered males or females' - suggesting that a sense of identity springs from so many diverse elements that it is fallacious to assume that people can be identified collectively based on one or other characteristic which they are perceived to share.

Queer Theory's critique of 'gay' and 'lesbian' as stable identities in themselves informed positions and arguments from writers and performers, from within the gay and lesbian and various Queer sub-cultures, that are critical of the notion of 'gay and lesbian identity' as well as the notion of Queer. In his preface to *Anti-Gay* (ed. Simpson, 1996), Simpson says that in the gay community's appropriation of Queer, it 'took what it wanted and disregarded and suppressed the threatening stuff' (Simpson, *ibid.* p xvi).

Simpson refers to what Leo Bersani calls ‘de-gaying’, in *Homos* (1995) - a process by which Bersani says ‘gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their awareness of how they have been *constructed* as gay men and lesbians’ (1995 p 6) - suggesting that ‘de-gaying’ is also the ‘result of postmodernism finally catching up with gay and fragmenting its pretentious “grand narrative”’ (*ibid.* p xvii) and calling for a new dialectic.

In their introduction to *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* (1997), editors Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel consider how language facilitated the construction of identities. They do not propose the term ‘pomosexual’ as a replacement of ‘Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual- Transgender-and- Friends’. At the same time they acknowledge ‘the usefulness of having one name by which all ‘Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-and-Friends’ might be called’ (*ibid.* p 20). They situate their position ‘within and in relation to the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-and-Friends community’ but also as a ‘backlash towards this community’, to ‘certain assumptions widely held within and/or about it, essentialist assumptions about what it means to be queer’ (*ibid.* p 20). Their rejection of the word ‘queer’ is founded on their view that the co-option of this term as a strategy against ‘the hetero world’ has resulted in the word ‘serving to bind and configure us in our divergent lives’. The term ‘pomosexual’, would refer to individuals who ‘like the queer, who s/he closely resembles, may not be tied to a single sexual identity, may not be content to reside within a category measurable by social scientists or acknowledged by... rainbow-festooned gays’ but whose position is located

in a space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity

reside - a boundary-free zone...It challenges either/or categorizations in favour of largely unmapped possibility...It acknowledges the pleasure of transgression, as well as the need to transgress limits that do not make room for all of us. (*ibid.* p 23)

In the appropriation of the term 'pomosexual' as an affirmative self-nominated identity, together with its juxtaposition with and also its opposition to Queer, the implications of its meaning are, as I see it, unclear. By its location 'within and in relation to' the 'Lesbian-Gay-Transgender-and-Friends community' and its employment as part of the language of the 'backlash' against this community, the term 'pomosexual' acquires an ambivalence that is also characteristic of the term 'queer', depending on the reading. There appears to be little to distinguish between the agenda in which the term 'pomosexual' represents a position which 'challenges either/or categorizations' and binary forms of sexual and gender identity and the agenda in which the term 'queer' represents a position of 'challenge to the dominant labelling philosophies' and 'discrete gender categories' (Meyer *ibid.* p1). The acknowledgement of the 'need to transgress limits that do not make room for all of us' appears to be as inclusive an agenda as that of Bornstein's vision of Queer theatre which 'would include members of any borderline community or non-community....anyone who challenges a cultural binary; it would include anyone who is Other' (Bornstein, *ibid.* p164). However, it is arguable that there is a qualitative difference between the terms 'pomosexual' and 'queer' in that the former is intentionally associated with the Postmodern - Queen and Schimel claim that they are reacting against the essentialist assumptions about what it means to be 'queer' in the 'same way that in the art world Postmodernism reacted to Modernism' (*ibid.* p 20) - and that the latter, 'queer', has become associated with organizations like *Outrage!*, *ACT UP* and *Queer Nation* and the queer/gay struggle against homophobia

and heterosexism rather than with the meaning it has as part of the critique of discrete gender categories, gay and lesbian identities themselves and gay and lesbian lifestyle.

As Chris Green of *The Divine Feud* says in interview (p93),

I think Queer was supposed to be a lot of things that it never really delivered.....the consumerization of Queerness has become what a lot of it is about now.....when 'Queer' became a life-style rather than an attitude.

The preceding development of the notion of 'queer' to distinguish between the various nuances and meanings given to the term depending on which part of its historical development is being referred to so will make clear the sense in which I am using the term for the purposes of analyzing the performers in this study. The term 'queer' will have a different meaning depending on its use, who is using it and the context in which it is used. The term can be used

- a) as a simple short-hand for 'gay and lesbian', or 'gay, lesbian and transgender',
- b) to challenge traditional normative structures and contest normative discourses,
- c) to challenge, specifically, the male-female gender binary by representing positions that intentionally set out to transgress this binary,
- d) to challenge the concept of fixed identities and gender, by seeking to destabilize the frames of social and sexual identity,
- e) as a term that is seen as having come to mean the consumerization of a lifestyle, assimilated by the heterosexual world as well as by the gay community,
- f) as a term that has potential to function as an unfixed position for engagement and discourse, never fully owned but redeployed and itself 'queered' from some developmentally prior usage.

My own usage of the term 'queer' as I am applying it to facilitate description and

analyze the images in the work of the performers in this study is confined to its meanings as

- a) a position adopted by individuals who identified with a kind of *gender fluidity*, a shape-shifting agenda, which puts them outside the normative structures of the male-female gender system, to which extent they may be considered to be gender transgressive and liminoid,
- b) a term which the selected performers identified as applicable to their own work which has been informed by their life situations and self-identifications,
- c) as a description of a performance strategy utilized by these performers in order to play with indicators of both genders, thereby presenting a gender fluid, shape-shifting agenda in order to intentionally critique and transgress gender roles within the male-female gender binary as well as to critique and transgress the cultural mores of the gay and lesbian neo-orthodoxy. With these considerations in mind, I wish now to look at the notion of *Queer performance* itself.

### **Queer performance**

Just as not all lesbians and gay men would identify themselves as Queer, not all performances that involve aspects of gender play such as gender role reversal or cross-gender casting would be considered to be Queer performances. I shall, therefore, be putting the following questions:

What are the characteristics of Queer performance?

and

To what extent would the performers/ performances I have studied demonstrate these characteristics? I shall be limiting myself to these two questions for now and explore

the nature of drag and its place in gender transgressive performance later on in this Chapter.

Michael Wilson, in *Rehearsals towards any future performance that would be-Queer* (1995), argues that Queer performance should be ‘oppositional’ and ‘disruptive of orthodoxies and hegemonic structures’ and goes on to add that it should

possess a radical sense of self-consciousness and should consistently undercut itself as a representation. It should point to other representations and problematize them as ‘invention’, ‘fiction’ and ‘myth’. (Wilson, *ibid.* p19)

He adds that it

is not an academic or rigorous category. It is unfixed and an intuitive one. It will be recognized by its ‘effects’ rather than by any inherent qualities...Queer performance is a strategic intervention that is no longer queer as soon as you know exactly what it is: it’s queer, isn’t it? (*ibid.* p20)

I shall add to Wilson’s criteria my own considerations of the term ‘queer’ (above) and explore the performances in the light of the following:

- a) the extent to which they are ‘oppositional’ to ‘orthodoxies and hegemonic structures’ (Wilson, *ibid.*);
- b) the extent to which they challenge the male-female gender binary through gender fluidity, *playing* with gender codes;
- c) the extent to which they challenge the concept of fixed identity as embodied in a fully unified, integrated subject;
- d) the extent to which they present a challenge to the gay and lesbian cultural neo-orthodoxy, what Bornstein has termed the ‘fundamentalist right wing’ (Bornstein, *ibid.*).

These performances stem, to a large degree, from the life circumstances of the

performers, writers and directors concerned who identify with some queer or borderline community or non-community. In this respect, their work is immediately distinguishable from that of any performer, writer or director who may also produce performances which involve cross-dressing or cross-gendered casting but whose life situation can be perceived as remaining within the parameters of the dominant categorical gender system. In such a case, it would be arguable that the work is not necessarily an embodiment of gender transgression so much as it contains a series of traditional theatrical conventions for some other agenda than that with which Queer performance is concerned. An example of this might be a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* which would employ cross-gender casting but leave the plot within the heterosexual domain with no intention of presenting a critique of the gender categories themselves beyond simple role reversal. There may be valid and important explorations of male and female gender roles in terms of power, status, etc, in such a production - as in the New York production of *King Lear* in which Lear was played by Ruth Maleczech (cited in Ferris, 1993, p3) - but these examinations could still be seen as working from a position of acceptance of the categorical gender system. Such a production would not be seen as intentionally gender transgressive and, therefore, not a Queer performance. Instead, it would be like shifting the furniture around in the room rather than questioning the notion as to why the room needs to exist in the first place, which, I suggest, is the declared intention of Queer performance.

While the performances I have observed have represented a wide range of performance genres, I shall be confining myself at this stage to theatre and cabaret performances,

dealing with street performances at parades and at various festivals and celebrations in later chapters.

**Theatre productions: Scripted Ensemble Plays:**

**Kate Bornstein, Rhinoceros Theatre: *Hidden: A Gender* ( 1989)**

**Split Britches/Bloodlips: *Belle Reprise* ( 1991)**

**Gloria Theatre: *Sarrasine* ( 1991)**

In Bornstein's play, which examines the suicide of Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth century hermaphrodite, she presents issues of gender-play by a variety of means - via transgendered casting, fluidity of structure and style, the blending of several genres into one piece and shifts in performer/spectator relationships. Bornstein locates the play in three playing areas one of which is the space for the character Doc Grinder, who is the host/barker described in the stage directions as 'part twentieth century television talk show host and part nineteenth century medicine side-show barker. It is never clear whether Doc is a man or a woman, and this ambiguity is never acknowledged by Doc' (Bornstein *ibid.* 1998). Scenes shift from a Marx Brothers' style parody to freak-show barker type monologues, from demonstrations of re-assignment surgery to a dreamlike surreal dance sequence to a television game show *What's my Gender?*

The travelling medicine side-show was essentially a 'freak' show where 'monsters' and people with various bodily distortions were exhibited as entertainment. By locating the play, which focuses largely on the experiences of the hermaphrodite Barbin within such a space and by utilizing the strategy of the medicine show barker, Bornstein deliberately associates the issues of gender ambiguity (the hermaphroditic nature of Barbin and Doc Grinder's ambiguous identity) with the world of those who have been excluded and

outlawed from the dominant culture of normalcy. The essential vision of Bornstein's play lies, I believe, in the gender transgressive theme where the two 'transsexual' characters, Herman and Herculine, are seen to be really fulfilled while they are both gender ambiguous and portrayed as 'One' and 'Another' in true, blissful states of transsexual change. At the point where they achieve gender certainty neither can recall or relive that blissful state again. It may be argued that Bornstein's strategies were applied simply because she was writing about a nineteenth century hermaphrodite. However, I offer that by utilizing these strategies, Bornstein was deliberately creating a metaphor for the challenge which gender ambiguity presents to the dominant heterosexual culture and the male-female binary. She uses the hermaphroditic body which Barbin was born with as an agent to formulate her statement against the bi-polar gender system in which her 'chosen' transsexual body is proscribed. By doing this and utilizing the 'freak' show metaphor, Bornstein also associates Queerness with the Grotesque.

Similar innovations with fluidity of form and content appear in the work of *Split Britches*, a lesbian women's theatre company, and *Bloolips*, a company of male performers who have been referred to as *radical drag Queens* and whose prime mover is Bette Bourne. The two companies collaborated on the production of *Belle Reprieve*, a re-working of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The narrative form was contained within bits of non-narrative action where the actors discuss the kind of show they want to play. Gender in this production was presented as constantly shifting - some of the male roles being played by women (Peggy Shaw as Stanley) and some of the women's by the men. Masculine stereotypes were constantly placed side by side

with the feminine and were enacted by actors of differing biological genders. This sort of *playing* with the stereotypes makes for a transgressive Queer critique of gender roles and stereotypes in which the work of a gay writer, Tennessee Williams, is reclaimed, as it were. The underlying Queer sexuality that is perceived to be within the writing is presented in a radical re-working which juxtaposes two different styles, narrative and commentary on the narrative. In so doing the gender fluidity present in the content of the production is embodied in the structural form of the production.

Watching *Belle Reprieve*, as with Gloria Theatre's *Sarrasine*, involves one in considering what Drorbaugh so nicely calls the 'mercurial qualities' of sex, gender and sexuality (in Ferris, 1993 p139). What the transgendered casting, together with the juxtapositions of styles and gender stereotypes, does is embody the crisis of category and, in so doing, to present a critique of the categorical system within the dominant culture. In *Sarrasine* (p126), the world of the female opera *diva* is set against the world of the drag singer. The three performers who are of various ages, genders and gender behaviours, are all on stage at the same time portraying La Zimbanella. The presentation of one character split between several performers of varying genders embodies, in a sense, a Queer critique of the notion of *a single unified Self* that is identifiable through the dominant categorical system based on sex and gender orientation.

**Doo Cot: *Peacock* (1994)**

**Ivan Cartwright: *It Took More Than One Man* (1996)**

In Doo Cot's *Peacock* (p125), the two central male characters were represented by a

selection of life-sized puppets manipulated by the two female performer/puppeteers. The experience of watching the male characters being 'played' by puppets manipulated by female puppeteers was similar to the experience of watching the three performers in Gloria Theatre's production *Sarrasine* enacting the part of La Zimbanella. As puppeteers (female) were visible at all times and the puppets (male) were life-sized, one became very conscious that it was a fusion of the femaleness of the operators with the maleness of the puppet figures that, together, embodied the experiences and qualities of the male characters in the story. The overall effect was one of neither maleness nor femaleness but a state that appeared similar to that expressed by a performer in drag, where the mercurial qualities of gender seem to replace and to some extent transcend the categorical male and female qualities of the dominant gender class system.

In the scene where the main character attends a nightclub and meets his lover, the interplay of male puppets, female puppeteers and male human performer in drag providing the cabaret entertainment in the night club provides further insights into the 'mercurial' qualities of gender and sexual identity. Here there are several performance levels at work. Maleness and femaleness (the actual human performer/singer and the human puppeteers) are presented side by side with gender transgressive images ( the cross-dressed human performer and cross-dressed puppet figure) (Plate 8). The total effect of this scene is to present the drag puppet character and the main male character from a position that is not fully unified or gendered. The choice of a bull-dog puppet to represent the forces of bigotry and oppression makes a clear connection with the Establishment and the political right-wing, heavily caricatured though it may be. The

bull-dog adds a heightened sense of the authoritarian aspect of the dominant culture which is portrayed as being hostile and oppressive. The performance strategies employed by Doo Cot in *Peacock* are clear embodiments of gender fluidity and their statements are strongly Queer and critical of an oppressive society (represented by the bull-dog) that seeks to destroy that which is different from itself (represented by the peacock) and different from its heterosexual value system which, in this case, is the gay relationship which is enacted through the two male puppets manipulated by the two lesbian puppeteers.

In his one man show *It Took More Than One Man*, Ivan Cartwright (p124) presents the issue of gender fluidity by enacting his journey from the state of maleness through to his re-assignment into transgendered femaleness and back to maleness having decided that a constructed femaleness is no more suitable a gender for him than his biological maleness had been. The performance embodies not only gender fluidity, with Cartwright moving from one end of the gender binary to the other, but also the strong statement that neither gender is relevant for him. He acknowledges the constructed nature of his so-called femaleness and the impossibility of his ever being able to be a woman merely by having hormonal treatment and surgery. Cartwright's dénouement is not returning to the position of being a *man*, though he has reverted to the body of a male, but finding and claiming a position as a *Queen* - an identity that is assumed by a certain kind of male but which is not available within the gender-role system and which is, therefore, gender transgressive, Queer and firmly outside the male-female binary.

### **Cabaret performances in pub venues:**

#### **Dave Lynn & Malitza (1996)**

#### **The Divine Feud: *The Divine Feud* (1996)**

In his cabaret performances with Michael Topping (Malitza), Dave Lynn refers to himself as 'a Queen', 'a Jewish Queen', 'he' or 'she', at various times throughout the show, but never as a 'woman' or as a 'lady'. He doesn't have a character other than 'Dave Lynn', whom he says he wants to 'be as real as possible - a man dressed up in women's clothes'. Malitza, on the other hand, is a *character* who, to the extent of image and name, is different from the performer himself whose real name is Michael Topping. As with Dave Lynn, Malitza is referred to both as 'he' and 'she' at different times within the same performance. Malitza usually wears rather baggy, somewhat dowdy-looking dresses that have an element of aspiring glamour within them - floral prints, glittery fabric - always carries a dull-looking handbag and wears a wig that is usually very badly cut in a cropped style. He wears spectacles (which he does in real life as Michael) and a style of make-up that borders on the clownish with plenty of blusher but at a closer look one can see that there is facial hair visible on his lip and jaw which he has not bothered to conceal. The voice he generally uses to sing or speak is his own deep-throated voice. Michael does not attempt to employ a different tone or pitch for Malitza, like Hinge and Brackett or Dame Edna Everage, neither does he have a fictive biography of Malitza or personal history or relationships to form part of her material within the show. She is essentially there to accompany Dave Lynn but also to take various lines and parts within the comic dramatizations, impersonations, etc. She always sings songs, which are her own compositions, and tells elaborate jokes. In these songs and jokes the viewpoint taken

is always ambiguous - it can be that of Malitza, a middle-aged, rather dowdy but pleasant and hilarious woman or that of a gay man. The staple diet of the humour in the songs and jokes is what Michael calls 'light blue', ie: full of sexual innuendo, evacuatory language, lavatorial humour, but never made explicit, always concealed within plays on words and puns.

There is no expressed intention on the part of either of these performers to be portraying or impersonating women. The mixture of male and female indicators permits an ambiguity both within the content of the performance and within the reception of the performance by the audience. Dave Lynn says:

There is a character called Dave Lynn but I wanted that character to be as real as possible - a man dressed up in women's clothes - because that was the original funny side of dressing up. You didn't do it because you wanted to look like a woman. Well, I didn't. (p62)

The confusion created by the use of 'he' and 'she' for both performers is all part of the 'clowning around'. Dave Lynn maintains that it is the essence of the kind of drag that he and Malitza do as opposed to the performances of Dame Edna, where the audience knows that the performer is a man in drag but the character is presented within a heterosexual context, with a fictional husband, family, etc. There is no gender ambiguity with Dame Edna, no playing around with different gender indicators, no juxtapositions of styles. Nor do we find these elements in the drag performances of Danny La Rue. While he is always referred to as Danny La Rue, and not representing a character in the sense that Humphries does with Dame Edna, he is always undoubtedly a man in a dress. There is no playing around with 'he' and 'she'. He is usually introduced as *Mister* Danny La Rue and there are constant references to his

maleness - for instance, his entrance at the top of the stairs in a sequined gown and wig being punctuated with his introductory remark, 'I bet you're wondering where I put it?' There are no such phallic references in Dave Lynn and Malitza's performances.

With Dame Hilda Brackett and Dr. Evadne Hinge, the performers Perry St Clair and George Logan take on the personalities of the two women. Members of the audience are often carried by the illusion of these two old ladies who have their own histories, habits and idiosyncrasies that have little to do with the performers' realities. There is no gender fluid treatment there and it all has the appearance of being done very seriously. There is an illusion to maintain and here are actors playing out these parts as fully as possible. With Dave Lynn and Malitza, the play on gender, the clowning with names and impersonations, the proximity of the material offered on stage to the real-life experiences of the performers, the spontaneity of the performances, all serve to laugh at the rigidity of the existing gender system while at the same time using the indicators of both male and female gender images to do so.

While Dave Lynn and Malitza see their work in terms of 'entertainment', the oppositional position to the heterosexual hegemony is presented through the ridiculing of gender roles

and images by *playing* with both male and female gender indicators at the same time.

The gender fluidity here is mainly evidenced in the use of both male and female pronouns to refer to each other and the audience members of either gender. There are no character changes and neither performer is impersonating a female. The clowning around with detachable representational breasts that turn into Jewish caps and

hamburgers also heightens the irreverence with which the gender binary is treated. It is all free, liminoid gender *play* and because neither performer embodies a coherent gender identity on the stage they fall somewhere between both genders and the performance has elements of liminality as well.

‘Post-modern Queer experience - confusin’, ain’t it, confusin’, ain’t it?’ is the verse line of a song by *The Divine Feud* (p88). Cathy Peace and Chris Green refer to themselves as Queer performers because they see the essence of Queer as encompassing what they do. Peace says:

We call ourselves ‘queer’ because the essence of it encompasses what we do...I’m not an archetypal lesbian and Chris isn’t an archetypal gay man. In fact, I’d say we were both very transgressive. (p92)

By introducing themselves as ‘postmodern purveyors of pleasure’ as well as ‘the only male and female drag act in town’, they present themselves as having an agenda which involves drag and elements of gender play but which is also a critique of gender roles as well as of the nature of drag. I shall deal more fully with the implications of drag to these performers later on in this chapter. For the present I wish to focus on the Queer elements within this performance. Here, the ‘female drag’ element is not drag in the traditional sense of a woman cross-dressing as a man while the ‘male drag’ element is a traditional drag queen image (Plate 2). The gender ambiguity is further evidenced by the use of the name ‘Julie’ for both characters, a name which can be female but also can be a shortened form of the male name ‘Julian’. With their opening song, a tribute to three icons of the gay world, Danny La Rue, Shirley Bassey and Barbara Windsor, they place themselves at the very heart of established gay culture which they then

proceed to critique throughout the performance.

In the skit in the style of the end-of-the-pier ventriloquist's act with Green playing a gay ventriloquist and Peace playing his puppet, Dumpy Dyke, the main substance of the routine is the deconstruction of traditional gay images together with a questioning of the politics of Gay and Lesbian Pride. Dumpy Dyke's image is a caricature of the dungaree-clad, dowdy lesbian feminist who is allowed the stage by the gay male ventriloquist, a reference to the internal politics of the Gay Pride Festival which in 1995 had extended itself to include Lesbian and Gay Pride but was still seen as being predominantly under the dominance and control of gay male organisers. The allusion throughout the skit was to the prominence given to transgender issues within the Gay Pride Festival in 1996.

*The Divine Feud* operates on several levels as an embodiment of gender transgression and the way in which gender difference can be managed and manipulated within the gay and lesbian worlds, as a challenge to the existing notions regarding gender and as a comment on the consumerization of sexuality. Peace says:

We put people and images on the stage and we invite criticism of those images. We invite audiences to participate in their own process of deconstructing those images, if that is what they are going to do. We don't offer any analysis or clarification of the issues within the performance. (p94)

The oppositional stance taken by Peace and Green towards images in the gender system; the search for re-inventing ways in which gay men, lesbians, transgendered people relate to each other; the continual undercutting of their own performances and histories; all these elements place them within the criteria I set out in my considerations

of Queer performance. As far as their own self-identified positions in relation to Queer politics and Queer performance are concerned, Peace and Green take an intentionally transgressive stand and are critical of the development of the notion of 'Queer' which Green associates with 'Queer young things, if you like'. He says,

'It ends up being an exclusive thing not an inclusive thing at all...in a sense, it became run by gay men.....Queer became fashion based, more 'life-style' based, it became 'cool' places to go, it didn't become 'everybody can do what they want' and we're all bound by being transgressive, which is my understanding of the word' (p92)

Cathy Peace adds that 'aside from the transsexual and transgender thing it (Queer) is also about lesbians and gay men being queer. But it's become removed from that whole idea' (p93).

I now wish to turn to the common element in these Queer performances, the element of *drag*, to present some of the critiques within the discourse of *drag* and then consider some of the re-definitions of drag presented by contemporary Queer performers.

### **Drag**

While I consider that drag to be an integral performative strategy in the embodiment of gender transgression, I also suggest that drag is essentially *different* from Queer. I need to acknowledge that not all drag can be considered to be Queer. I am referring here to 'safe' theatrical conventions of cross-dressing such as the Dame in a Christmas pantomime, where there is no expressed intention to undermine or oppose the heterosexual hegemony, or to the disguises that characters may assume in plays in order simply to advance the plot. Drag will only be implicated in a Queer position when that position maintains an agenda that is intentionally gender transgressive

Since Peter Ackroyd's somewhat definitive text on drag *Dressing Up: The History of an Obsession* (1979) there have been various critiques and reclamations of drag by academics and practitioners alike. While Ackroyd considered drag to be primarily homosexual and saw it as misogynistically parodying and mocking women, he also saw cross-dressing as 'an act of palpable defiance towards a society which imposes rigid sexual stereotypes' (*ibid.* p21).

If drag performance is seen as the embodiment of the transvestite/ cross-dresser then it is arguable that it is, also, a part of the palpable defiance to which Ackroyd refers. It is then arguable that in order to embody this defiance and articulate it the drag performer exploits the forms of the 'absurdly rigid stereotypes' already existing within the dominant culture. The parodying of these stereotypes by drag performance may then be read not as the misogynistic mockery of women *per se*, but as a critique of the stereotypes through comic representations of them. In doing so the drag performer could be read as problematizing these gender based cues and roles as inventions and myths, as prescribed by Michael Wilson (*ibid.* 1996).

Janice Raymond in *The Politics of Transgenderism* (in Ekins & King, 1996) offers a feminist critique of drag. She uses the term 'drag' as being interchangeable with 'cross-dressing' and 'transvestism'. She writes:

Cross dressers, drag queens and heterosexual transvestites.... depend upon a certain mimicry of women's persons, roles, status and dress that.... does nothing to challenge the political power of the normative, dominant, powerful class of men that the male gender bender belongs to. (Raymond, *ibid.* pp217-218)

In *The Transsexual Empire*, Raymond has said that

all transexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception. (Raymond, *ibid.* p104)

Bornstein's contention with this is that what is being challenged is male privilege and that the male/ female gender system and roles are part of the structures that underwrite the system that maintains that privilege. While transgendered people may carry over into their transgendered lives some of that privilege and while the male drag performer is undoubtedly male and also participates in that system of privilege, what the Queer drag performer is doing, arguably, is to embody the challenge to the gender system and call it into question by playing with the gender roles inherent within it. If the drag performer seeks to do this in a comic way it will include forms of parody and, thereby, be open to arguments like Ackroyd's and Raymond's. The claim that transgender gender play contributes to the challenging and undermining of the dominant gender role system is dismissed by Raymond as merely 'repackaging of the old gender roles' (*ibid.* p218).

In *Boys Will Be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag*, Carole-Anne Tyler points out that men in drag may not achieve the goal of opposing gendered differences as they may be identified with phallic identities. She points out the psychoanalytic view that the man in drag 'feminizes himself in order to masculinize himself, attempting to better secure a masculine or phallic and "whole" identity through cross-dressing' (1991, p42). Judith Butler, however, in *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (1991), cites Esther Newton's notion that drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs to some other group but that gender itself is a kind of impersonation. In the dominant and compulsory gender system drag can be seen as the appropriation by members of one

gender of the characteristics that are conventionally associated with the opposite gender.

Arguing that there is no *proper* gender, Butler goes on to say:

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, there is no original gender that drag imitates. (Butler, *ibid.* 1991 p21)

Or as RuPaul, the famous American drag queen, puts it quite simply:

When people say ‘You dress like a woman’, I say I don’t think I do, because women don’t really dress like this. I dress like our cultural made-up version of what femininity is, which isn’t real. (Interview with Mary Harron. *The Independent on Sunday*. Jan. 1995)

I would like now to look at how this change of focus within the discourse of drag is presented reflected by the performers in this study.

*The Divine Feud* raises several issues as to the nature of drag. The fact that they market themselves as ‘a male and female drag act’ invites questioning from the starting point of making the bookings for venues. Cathy Peace frequently gets asked if she wears suits. She often gets told that she could not possibly be doing drag as she is a woman.

In considering *The Divine Feud*, we are introduced to meanings of drag that are different from the traditional notions that equated drag with ‘cross-dressing’. For Peace, drag is not equatable with cross-dressing. It is a performance form in its own right, one that has its roots in burlesque:

CP: I got interested in drag because I used to see a lot of drag and it was generally men taking the piss out of women and I felt there was something for me as a lesbian performer to do in that field....I did a lot of street theatre, clowning and cabaret with a straight context and I used to play a lot of older women characters in straight theatre and it was basically, a bit like dragging up, putting on all sorts of stuff that I’m not and essentially that’s dragging up.

BB: But is that any different from being an actor playing a part? How does it make it drag?

CP: In a sense, of course, it is no different but the important thing for me is that drag has very strong roots in that kind of stereotype, grotesque, larger than life portrayals that come from clowning, burlesque, freak shows, that kind of thing. That's different from acting as such. And in some ways, drag is genderless. You may see a man doing it, usually, but it's a man taking that kind of performance strength from doing it. Obviously Chris is in cross-gender drag some of the time but not all. It's about dressing up, the heightened make-up, the false eye-lashes and all that goes with that kind of blown-up portrayal of stereotype, glam, show-girlie female images. I'm not being an actress when I'm doing that, I'm being more like a drag performer. (p94)

For Peace, cross-dressing is not relevant to her drag performance. What is relevant for Peace in her utilization of drag is an agenda of reclamation, a way in which she as a lesbian performer can reclaim aspects of a performance form within the context of Queer sexuality.

Amy Lamé is the host of her own performance/cabaret club called *Duckie* that has over the last three years established itself as an arena for Queer performance. She is an American lesbian performer who in her own one-woman show *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* described herself as a 'lesbian drag Queen'. The performance was autobiographical in nature and in it Lamé presented herself in a large gingham frock, wearing pigtails, false eyelashes, spectacles and a feather-boa. The text consisted of a narrative of her life and development as a lesbian together with songs and music. The form was that of a cabaret entertainment that included a variety of costume changes and audience participation games. It utilized some elements from traditional drag performance such as lip-sync and some elements drawn from burlesque. In it Lamé was challenging the images that had been prevalent within lesbian culture up till that time,

a culture that was rejecting traditional feminine images in favour of what Lamé calls ‘the urban dyke in leather jackets and dungarees’ culture:

AL: Images of very feminine lesbians didn’t abound at all. So that’s why *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian’s Body* in part was written. Because I felt I identified culturally with gay men and I felt like I was a gay man trapped in a lesbian’s body because there was no place for me it seemed in the lesbian world and lesbian culture at that time..... (p110)

Dave Lynn, Michael Topping, *The Divine Feud* could all be considered to be gender transgressive in the sense of embodying an oppositional stance to the dominant categorical gender system. However, Lamé is transgressive of the very images contained within the gender transgressive heterodoxy which was being perceived as the dominant orthodoxy within lesbian culture itself:

AL: The only thing that I did by calling myself a lesbian drag Queen was taking the piss out of lesbians who take on traditionally regarded ‘butch’, ‘non-girlie’ images as if that is to be every lesbian’s truth. I was saying that what I was doing was lesbian drag because I’m dressing as a feminine woman which a lesbian was not supposed to do. In this show, therefore, I was expressing my truth.

BB: I understand that but I’ve also heard people ask, ‘Why is she saying she’s a drag Queen? Drag is about cross-dressing. She’s not cross-dressing. So she shouldn’t say she is doing drag.’

AL: But I was cross-dressing in terms of the style that was acceptable to lesbian women though not in terms of gender.... (p111)

What Lamé has provided has been a shift in the perception of ‘drag’ from a term that denotes cross-gender dressing from male to female costume or vice versa to one that denotes the adoption of feminine costume by women performers within a culture that eschews feminine images for ‘butch’ or masculine ones. Her performance still embodies a transgression but this transgression stems from her oppositional stance to the images adopted by a lesbian culture, images that were born out of a gender transgressive position in relation to the dominant categorical gender class system but

were now perceived as being part of a new dominant lesbian orthodoxy.

If Lamé is a voice in opposition to the dominant lesbian cultural orthodoxy, The Divine David (Plate 3) can be seen as the most prominent voice that has been raised against contemporary gay culture. Arguably the most transgressive of all the performers in this study, he refers to himself as an ‘avant garde performance artiste’. His performances embody transgressive stances against any form of organization and categorization including Authority, Religion, the gender class system, heterosexist culture, the ‘gay scene’ and consumerist entertainment. His use of almost Gothic grotesque make-up, heavily applied all over his eyes and face, ornate jewellery and clothing (intentionally chosen to transgress categorization), all underline an anarchist position as a non-believer in rules, the concepts of gender, time, government and commercialism. David’s uncompromisingly confrontational and transgressive stance is extended to the interviews he has given to the gay press.

In 1997 The Divine David staged his *Traditional Comedy Drag Mime Tour* in a number of gay pubs and bars in London. This tour presented an oppositional stance to what have been regarded as the misogynistic performances of male performers who work with media-based stereotyped female images. The *Tour* heightened the absurdity and misogyny of such performances, while The Divine David, himself, could be considered to have been ‘dragged up’ while presenting his performance. There is a distinction being made here between various uses of drag. For The Divine David, the term ‘drag’ refers to clothes, costumes, the way one is dressed. The drag that he wears in his performances is transgressive in that it forms part of his overall strategy of

transcending sexual and gender categories. He has no intention of portraying any stereotypical female images. The drag performance within contemporary gay culture that involves cross-dressing in order to parody, mock or impersonate females and is performed by male performers who generally mime or 'lip sync' over the recorded voice of a female singer or comedienne is identified by The Divine David as 'traditional comedy drag mime' and is to be opposed and ridiculed as it is seen to be the misogynistic playing out of the gender categories.

Helena Goldwater is a performer who has referred to herself as a 'lesbian drag Queen' and as 'a Jewish drag Queen' (p123), combines aspects of vaudeville, cabaret and drag, in her performance pieces that centre on her preoccupations and explorations mainly around sensual experience, textures and sexuality. She sees her work as being referential to her own life situations and as reclaiming elements of drag entertainment within a feminist frame. In an interview with Frances Williams for *The Independent on Sunday* (Sept 8, 1996), she said:

I base a lot of my characters on the wonderful women I grew up with. They were really glamorous and I want to reclaim some of that in a feminist context. Although I look really over the top, it's not parody. This is who I am and where I come from; the fact that I'm a lesbian doesn't mean I'm disconnected from that. (Quoted by Williams in 'A Woman in Women's Clothing')

What these performers offer us is a shifting perspective of drag in Queer performance. Drag is not simply equated with cross-dressing but is considered as a form of parody and as travesty. It is acknowledged by them as a performance form in its own right, one which is perceived as being related to burlesque, vaudeville and the music hall, the grotesque and the glamorous, one which informs and inspires their own

performances, one which gives them access to strategies which they can utilize transgressively as travesty or as part of a personal and political process of expressing or reclaiming identity.

### **Summary**

Having outlined the evolution of the term 'queer', I have suggested that as it evolved to a position of non-alignment with any *specific* identity category, it could be annexed to any number of discourses. I have traced its development within Queer Theory and in relation to 'anti-gay' and 'pomosexuality' and have suggested that its meaning depends on the context within which it is being used and on who is using it. I have also offered several possible usages of the term:

- a) as a simple short-hand for 'gay and lesbian',
- b) as a term used to challenge traditional normative structures and contest normative discourses,
- c) as a term that is specifically used to challenge the male-female gender binary by representing positions that intentionally set out to transgress this binary,
- d) as a term that challenges the concept of fixed identities and gender, by seeking to destabilize the frames of social and sexual identity,
- e) as a term that is seen as having come to mean the consumerization of a lifestyle, assimilated by the heterosexual world as well as by the gay community,
- f) as a term that has potential to function as an unfixed position for engagement and discourse, never fully owned but redeployed and itself 'queered' from some developmentally prior usage.

I have also clarified that I am confining my own usage of the term ‘queer’ in this study to its meanings as

- i) a position adopted by individuals who identified with a kind of *gender fluidity*, a shape-shifting agenda, which puts them outside the normative structures of the male-female gender system, to which extent they may be considered to be gender transgressive and liminoid,
- ii) a term which the selected performers identified as applicable to their own work which has been informed by their life situations and self-identifications,
- iii) a performance strategy utilized by these performers in order to play with indicators of both genders, thereby presenting a gender fluid, shape-shifting agenda in order to intentionally critique and transgress gender roles within the male-female gender binary as well as to critique and transgress the cultural mores of the gay and lesbian neo-orthodoxy.

I have suggested that the set of criteria for Queer performance are the extent to which performances

- a) are ‘oppositional’ to ‘orthodoxies and hegemonic structures’;
- b) challenge the male-female gender binary through gender fluidity, *playing* with gender codes;
- c) challenge the concept of fixed identity as embodied in a fully unified, integrated subject;
- d) present a challenge to the gay and lesbian cultural neo-orthodoxy;
- e) would stem from the life circumstances of the performers, writers and directors

concerned who identify with some Queer or borderline community or non-community.

After an exploration of the work of a number of performers in the light of the above criteria, I have also considered the position of drag within Queer performance. I have suggested that drag is different from Queer in that it is implicated in the Queer position only as far as it is concerned with gender transgression. I have also suggested that the performers I have observed have challenged traditional notions within the discourse of drag by re-defining it as

- i) a performance form in its own right with roots in burlesque;
- ii) a performance strategy utilized by them to embody their gender transgression positions in relation to the dominant categorical gender class system, where it is seen as travesty;
- iii) a strategy utilized by them to embody transgressive positions in opposition to what is perceived as a new dominant orthodoxy within the gay/lesbian cultures.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### GENDER TRANSGRESSIVE IMAGES IN QUEER PERFORMANCE AND THE GROTESQUE

Having established the liminoid nature of gender fluidity within the gender transgressive performances I have observed and the extent to which the performers concerned can be said to meet the criteria that I am applying to Queer performance, I will now consider the extent to which these gender transgressive performances can be said to relate to the Grotesque. My focus will, mainly, be within the conceptual frame of Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism'. My own working definition of the term 'grotesque' combines what Bakhtin calls 'the process of degradation' and the transgressive use of the contrast of opposites, the 'ugly' as 'beautiful', the 'painful' as 'comic', the 'monstrous' as 'delightful'. There is a shared sense of the term 'grotesque' somewhere between my definition of the term and Marina Warner's suggestion in *No Go The Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (1998), where she describes the Grotesque as being a state in which 'fascination and disgust co-exist' (*ibid.* p254). As I am concerned with the bodily aspects of the Grotesque and the functions of the body in terms of behaviour, I will first consider notions concerning the Dramatic Body and Queer embodiment in the work of these performers. I shall then present an outline of general theories of the Grotesque which will lead into a more detailed exploration of the gender transgressive images in these performances in relation to *grotesque appearance* and *grotesque behaviour and body processes*.

### **Identity and The Body.**

The body is usually seen as the primary means by which identity is formed, realized and expressed and through which communication between people takes place. Freud placed the ego firmly within the body as it is ultimately derived from bodily sensations (Freud, 1927).

In *Role-playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (1982), Bruce Wilshire establishes his Mimetic Theory of Identity on the foundation stone of ‘the body’ when he writes that ‘identity is laid down bodily and mimetically’. He draws on Schilder’s *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1950) in which Schilder says that a person knows himself via his body and his body-image and that this body-image is connected also to his direct experience of other people’s bodies. Similarity to others tends to be experienced as identification with others and contributes to the individual’s sense of belonging (or not) with others. Thus does the individual establish a sense of identity.

In *Social Bodies* (1975), Polhemus and Benthall offer a view of the body as being the prime means of communication and the body is likened to a surface on which aspects of identity such as social status, gender, age etc. are inscribed. If the body is seen to be such a surface then it is also the instrument through which aspects of gender are learned as part of an individual’s own identity and transmitted to others over time. There is, arguably, an inherently cumulative sense to this process, echoing something of Judith Butler’s view that identity is

tenuously constituted in time..... through the stylization of the body and, hence,

must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, *ibid.* p270).

In *Totem and Taboo* (1950), Freud considers the body in terms of the tension experienced by individuals in the conflict between self-expression (gratification) and constraint (social regulation). Turner, too, in *From Ritual to Theater* (1982) considers the self/body dynamic to be one that involves both constraint and potential. It is clear that it is through the body that the individual will address issues of self-expression and constraint. The gender transgressive individuals with whom I was concerned at the start of this research clearly perceived their bodies to be the fields on which the struggles between their chosen gender identities and their biologically and socially 'ascribed' genders were enacted. Some of them opted for gender-reassignment surgery which gave them access to a degree of certainty and stability in the gender of their choice while others, being more ambivalent in their feelings towards one or other available gender, opted to 'play with gender' either by having partial surgery or none at all, preferring to live outside the male-female duality. It is this latter category that I believe to be embodying the continuous conflict between social/biological constraint and the potential of self-expression that is present within the body/self relationship *per se*, as well as embodying the transgressive political Queer rejection of the male-female gender system. I see the gender transgressive Queer performers I have studied as embodying both the continuous conflict and the gender transgressive Queer position in various types of theatrical performances. They are, therefore, using their bodies in theatrical or dramatic acts of performance which have an over-all gender transgressive Queer agenda. I feel it would be useful at this point to consider some of the notions of The

Dramatic Body and how they may inform my thesis.

### **The Dramatic Body and Queer embodiment.**

Modernist performance theorists and theatre practitioners, like Grotowski, saw the body as the cornerstone of performance. His 'ascetic theatre' was a theatre 'in which the actors and audience are all that is left. All the other visual elements - e.g. plastic, etc. - are constructed by means of the actor's body, the acoustic and musical effects by his voice' (Grotowski, 1968 p33) and are based on the vision that 'the essence of theatre is the actor, his actions and what he can achieve' (*ibid.* p143).

In *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living*, Phil Jones cites the work of the Bauhaus movement in Germany in the early twentieth century as a useful starting point for a study of the body in drama. The body was given a prime place in theatre by Walter Gropius and Oskar Schlemmer who created a series of diagrams in order to show the 'transformation of the body as it exists in theatrical space' (Gropius, 1979 p5). In *The Theatre of the Bauhaus* Gropius claims that 'the history of theatre is the history of the transfiguration of the form' (Gropius, *ibid.*). Writing on The Dramatic Body, Jones says:

The term 'Dramatic Body' refers to the body when it is involved in a theatrical or dramatic act. The Dramatic Body is a place where imagination and reality meet.....The actor discovers and expresses roles, ideas and relationship through face, hands, movement - the body. The audience will experience theatre primarily as these bodily expressions in the stage space. (Jones, 1996, p150)

The ethno-historian Greg Dening approaches the question of ideas, theatre and space by referring to them as 'sets'. He writes in *Performances* that

‘Theory’ and ‘theatre’ come to us out of the same Greek origin - *thea*, sight, viewing; *theoros*, spectator. Theory - a mind-set for viewing; theatre - a space-set for spectating; theatrical - a convention-set for mimesis. (Denning, 1996 p104)

The body of the performer and its actions during the performance would be fundamental aspects of this ‘convention-set’, just as any location at which the performance would be taking place - a theatre, a cabaret bar, a street corner or a park - would be a valid ‘space-set’. In gender transgressive Queer performance, the performers can be seen as offering their bodies publicly in performance as embodiments of their personal questioning, rejecting or queering of gender identity as a stable, body-bound state. They may also be seen as embodying in their performances political and artistic ideas as well as strategies regarding performance itself.

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

a tranny is going out in drag. I’m just putting my habit on because I AM A NUN. I’m not a pretend nun. I am a nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest. (p85)

he is not only expressing the ideology and strategies of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence and the *idea* that such performances are a way of ‘losing ego’, he is also representing himself through his ‘nunsona’ and his performances. Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye remains, after all, a *male* nun. The Divine David’s performed diatribes against categories of gender would resonate very differently with his audiences if, rather than appearing in his lime green satin two-

piece suit with Gothic make-up on his face, black lip-stick, enormous paste ear-rings, glittering costume jewellery, fish-net tights and bright red stiletto-heeled shoes, smoking a cigarette in a long-stemmed cigarette holder, he appeared in a three-piece businessman's suit or cross-dressed in the manner of a female impersonator. There would be a greater distance between the external sign of the three-piece suit and the inward reality of the anti-gender, anarchist, drug-associated ideology that underpins and informs his performances. If he was a black rather than a white performer the resonances would be different again.

Philip Auslander has said,

In performance.....the body, itself, is the focus at which the workings of ideological codes are, perhaps, the most insidious and also the most difficult to analyze, for the performing body is always both a vehicle for representation and, simply, itself. Even in the most mimetic forms of modern Western theatre, the actor's body never fully becomes the character's body. (Auslander 1997, p90)

Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye remains a male nun. However close Michael Topping may feel Malitza to be to his 'feminine side', his body is still a body encoded with male codes and signs. The Divine David may reject gender categories and even categories of sexuality but he is still not an hermaphrodite. Ivan Cartwright may be the 'kind of man' he is - a Queen - but he is still perceived by the audience as the biological male body that he is on the stage. These performers can be said to be using their male-encoded physical bodies publicly in performance in order to embody the *idea* that gender identity should not be body-bound. By offering themselves publicly as embodiments in this way their dramatic bodies are not vehicles of maleness *per se* but instruments for the expression of gender transgressive Queer

ideology that rejects body-bound definitions of gender. The criticism that these performers do not actually change the gender situation because they are male performers with male-encoded bodies and will inevitably remain so, is answerable by the argument that this criticism itself is founded on body-bound definitions of gender. These gender transgressive Queer performers are not impersonating women nor are they representing a stable androgyny as an integration of maleness and femaleness. They are employing gender-play in order to embody the rejection of the notion that maleness and femaleness are contained within the bounds of the body.

The gender transgressive notion that gender identity needs to be liberated from body-bound cultural definitions challenges the very basis of society's sexual-cultural security. Its liminoid nature gives rise to the fear that the neat, established categories of gender are not easily containable. Elaine Showalter (1991, pp4-5) suggests that these are 'responses typical of the *fin de siècle*' and that there are similarities between our current period and the turn of the last century. The ethno-historian Greg Dening (1996, p112) suggests that the Puritan William Prynne wrote *Historiomastix* as a 'nightmare vision of a world out of control' for much the same reasons. Dening cites Barish's *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (1981, p83) in which Barish lists Prynne's categories of 'wicked and unchristian pantomimes' as including 'effeminate mixt dancing', 'periwigs', 'lascivious pictures', 'wanton fashions', 'face painting' and 'lascivious effeminate musicke'. The Puritan disapproval of theatre was, partly, because theatricality was seen as culturally alien to godliness, the desirable inward state of the individual. I acknowledge that Prynne was voicing the Puritan disapproval of theatricality generally. However, I am making the point that it is the process of

distancing between external sign and the reality that the sign signifies that is at the heart of cultural disruption. When there is no clear connection between the external signs of gender and the reality of the physical genders that these signs signify then a culture of gender certainty begins to be replaced by a culture of ambivalence and insecurity. Denning says that 'it is the possibility of there being some distance between external sign and inward realities that is most threatening' (Denning 1996, p113). It is this distancing of the external signs of gender from the body-bound gender identity that the signs signify that I believe to be the basis of gender transgressive Queer embodiment.

When Bornstein asserts that her new female body is not the final expression of her 'inner self', when Robert O'Neill Crossman/Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look/Sister Kiss Me Arse Goodbye says 'I AM A NUN', when Cartwright identifies himself as the 'Queen' that he is, when the Divine David claims in performance that our genital arrangements have nothing to do with who we 'really are', they are all rejecting the body-bound definitions of gender. They are also claiming that there is a different relationship between the 'self' and the 'gendered body' than that which is culturally acceptable. Here the notion of the 'self' appears to be perceived as an essential, metaphysical, almost mystical concept - genderless and outside social category - as opposed to the notion of the 'self' being viewed as a social construct or, as Butler argues, as arising out of a series of performative acts. Queer embodiment seems to return the notion of the 'self' and the notion of the 'body' to neutralized states that seem to exist in a utopian place where the neat categories of body-bound gender do not exist. However, while these exponents of gender transgression take oppositional positions

with regard to body-bound definitions of gender, they do need to live in gendered bodies and utilize the male-female gender binary in order to enact their gender play. The refusal of the gender binary can only be given embodied form in performance by acknowledging that gender binary. When these gender transgressive exponents of Queer embodiment take this position, I suggest, they are being both publicly liminal and liminoid and, herein, lies their capacity for the comic.

I wish now to look, generally, at notions of the Grotesque before going on to consider presenting gender transgressive Queer performance in terms of grotesque appearance and grotesque behaviour.

### **The Grotesque.**

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser considered the term 'grotesque' as a 'structure' whose nature could be read as 'the estranged world' (Kayser, 1963, p184). Kayser gives a detailed developmental history of the word and offers that it evolved into a 'significant' word, 'an esthetic category referring to certain creative attitudes (dreamlike, for instance), contents and structures, as well as to effects upon the beholder (Wieland's "laughter, disgust and astonishment")' (Kayser, *ibid.* p179).

Christoph Wieland writing on the art of caricature in the eighteenth century offers that the essential nature of 'grotesque' was a detachment from reality. Kayser cites three types of caricatures classified by Wieland in *Unterredungen mit dem Pfarrer von \*\*\*\** (1775), one of which included

purely fantastic caricatures, or grotesques in the proper sense, where the painter....gives rein to an unchecked fancy....with the sole intention of provoking

laughter, disgust and surprise about the daring of his monstrous creations by the unnatural and absurd products of his imagination. (Kayser, *ibid.* p30)

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

In *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo distinguishes between two forms of the Grotesque - the Comic and the Uncanny, associating the former with Bakhtin's work on the carnival-grotesque in *Rabelais and His World*, and the latter with Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, 'the horror genre' and with Freud's essay "On the Uncanny" (Russo, 1995, p7). Russo locates the comic grotesque in the political domain, offering that it is employed largely in relation to social conflict - 'it is a virile category associated with the civic world of the public' (Russo, *ibid.* p8). The Grotesque as Uncanny, Russo suggests, is located in a more 'interiorized space' of internalized fantasy 'most strongly related to the psychic register' (Russo, *ibid.* p9). Russo's distinction between the materially embodied and the psychological aspects of the Grotesque is, arguably, itself based on a recognition and acknowledgement of the

division between interior and exterior worlds, the realm of the public and the private, the political and the personal.

The gender transgressive performers I have been studying may all be associated with both of Russo's categories, the 'Uncanny' and the 'Comic'. They may all be seen as 'anomalies', as 'monsters' and as 'anathema'. Rather like performance artists, their public performances are informed, to a large extent, by their personal lives and their private preoccupations and fantasies. In a sense, it is possible to see some of them giving publicly embodied expression to aspects of what Russo has called their 'interior worlds' (*ibid.*) In this regard they are expressing what might be perceived by spectators as being 'monstrous'. They could be seen as giving public expression to what may only reside in the inner recesses of the psyches of people who do not normally express their transgressive selves in terms of gender or sexuality. To this extent they would be reflecting the 'secrets' of others as well as publicly expressing their own interior fantasies. They would then be partaking of the nature of what Russo has called the 'Uncanny'. As far as their refusal of the gender binary can only be embodied by acknowledging that gender binary and by utilizing indicators of both poles of the binary in order for them to *play* with gender, they are, I have already suggested, both liminal and liminoid. This is fundamentally comic and, to this extent, they would be partaking of the nature of Russo's category of the 'Comic'.

It has been my argument in previous chapters that these gender transgressive Queer performers represent the de-stabilization of gender certainty, challenging existing systems and structures which in turn gives rise to the cultural insecurity which Elaine

Showalter has called ‘the relentless specter of millennial change’ (Showalter, *ibid.* p18). They hold before us a mirror, as it were, of a world that ceases to be reliable and communicate this world to us through images that can be received as ‘unnatural’, ‘absurd’, ‘disgusting’, ‘monstrous’ and Queer. In this they embody images that are grotesque and they can be said to fit all three of Kayser’s criteria for the term ‘grotesque’:

- a) as the creative process which intends to produce images containing ‘unreal elements’, which in these performances may be evidenced in the intentionally fluid mixing of genres, styles and genders that are deliberately employed in order to undercut and problematize the elements and categories of gender that are perceived as ‘normality’ and ‘real’ within the dominant heterosexual gender culture and its cultural forms;
- b) the works in themselves which embody elements associated with ‘estranged world’, which in these performers relates to the sense of ‘estrangement’ and the sense of being ‘outlaws’ from the dominant heterosexual gender culture as well as, in some cases, from the predominant gay and lesbian cultures;
- c) the reception of the work by spectators/audience who receive it as ‘disgusting’, ‘absurd’, ‘distorted’, ‘comic’, ‘fantastic’ etc., which is not evidenced so much by the audiences to which these works are performed as they tend to be those who belong to the ‘initiated’ queer/gay/lesbian/cabaret/performance art related cultures, as by the established and traditional elements within the fundamentalist sections of the dominant heterosexual gender culture, the predominant gay and lesbian cultures, as well as by the pathologizing forces within the institutions of medicine, psychiatry, religion etc.

In that these performers are representatives of Queer performance, they have, to varying

degrees, a transformational agenda and perceive themselves as ridiculing, questioning, challenging and, in some cases, intentionally seeking to undermine the dominant heterosexual gender culture. Much of this is demonstrated in their performances through the mockery and degradation of those images and behaviours that are perceived by them to be the established foundations of that culture. It is here, I suggest, that a relationship can be shown between the grotesque images and behaviours in these performances and Bakhtin's notions of 'grotesque realism' and 'the grotesque body'.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin grounded his concept of 'grotesque realism' in his readings of the texts of Rabelais, whom he considered to be the 'purest and most consistent representative of the grotesque body' (*ibid.* p30). He viewed the images within Rabelais' work as predominantly involving the 'material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation and sexual life' (*ibid.* p18). Bakhtin considered these to have been derived from the culture of 'folk humour' and the aesthetic concept that he calls 'grotesque realism' with its emphasis on the 'grotesque body'. The main process involved in grotesque realism is degradation - bringing 'down to earth' things that have been ascribed with elevated, spiritual or abstract natures. In bodily terms this process of degradation is concerned with the lower bodily functions of food digestion, defecation, flatulence, copulation, pregnancy and birth. It is also the direction of the body *downwards* through old age to death. It is a *moving* and a *renewing* force. It 'digs a grave for a new birth' (*ibid.* p12).

The grotesque body being associated with the 'lower bodily stratum', with roundness and largeness, with lavatorial and evacuatory processes, degradation, filth, death and

also with the dark containing womb, birth and rebirth, is excluded from the canons of classical aesthetics. It is not contained within the Renaissance 'aesthetics of the beautiful' (*ibid.* p29) and is the antithesis of the classical body which is spiritualized, static, monumental, smooth-textured and symmetrical. The grotesque body is irregular, secreting, multiple and changing, 'a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body' (*ibid.* p317).

As the process of degradation also involves non-bodily functions - the lowering of high status positions in society, for instance - Bakhtin conceives of the 'grotesque body' as a social body:

The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable (*ibid.* p19).

Here, Bakhtin identifies the 'grotesque body' with the proletariat, social transformation and the language of folk culture. On this level, the 'classical body' is identified with the 'high' official culture of the Renaissance with its traditional hierarchical power structures and the language of officialdom. For Bakhtin, a major characteristic separating these two languages is the element of laughter. Having little place in the literature of classical myth and epic, laughter was an essential and pivotal element in what Bakhtin calls 'folk humour' contained in the 'boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations' which opposed the serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture' (*ibid* p5). Bakhtin looked to medieval carnival as an embodiment of both material and social transformation and as a manifestation of the culture of 'folk

carnival humour'- a manifestation containing many aspects of the 'grotesque body'. For Bakhtin the laughter associated with grotesque realism was the laughter of renewal, festive laughter, as the essential nature of the grotesque body was a universal one of abundance, growth, health and renewal, representing all the people and not concerned with the individual or the 'bourgeois ego'.

If there is a relationship between Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' and gender transgressive Queer performance we would expect the embodiments within these performances to partake of something of the nature of the following characteristics:

- a) that the body, being grotesque, is excluded from the aesthetics of the beautiful as it is the antithesis of the 'classical body' which is monumental, smooth, static and symmetrical;
- b) that the body is in the process of becoming, is 'multiple and changing';
- c) that there is a concern with the 'lower bodily stratum', with those organs and parts of the body that are predominantly subject to hyperbolization. Bakhtin lists the eyes, mouth, the nose, the genital organs and the anus as these are associated with roundness and largeness and the bodily functions such as food digestion, flatulence, lavatorial and evacuatory processes;
- d) that there is a concern with the products of these bodily functions and processes such as filth, vomit, excrement and bodily fluids; with the various stages of the process of degradation (bringing down to earth) and renewal such as copulation, pregnancy, birth, death and rebirth; and also with the language (including oaths and curses) that is rooted in these processes and their products;
- e) that the bodily elements and processes in grotesque realism have a transformational

nature of growth and renewal, representing all the people.

I will consider the images within these performances in relation to the above criteria by distinguishing between those elements that relate to *grotesque appearance* and those that relate to grotesque behaviour and body processes.

### **Grotesque Appearance**

In considering grotesque appearance within the performances, I shall focus on the first two of Bakhtin's criteria that I have listed above: the grotesque body being the antithesis of the classical body and the grotesque body as 'multiple and changing' to which I add my own criterion of grotesque appearance as the contrast of opposites.

#### *i) The antithesis of the 'classical body'*

Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' was one that contained elements that were excluded from the canons of classical aesthetics within the medieval frame. To attempt an analysis of twentieth century images of the body as being 'grotesque' within that frame would, I suggest, be fallacious. However, it is arguable that contemporary Western (by which I mean European and American) aesthetics include idealized images of Health, Fitness and Beauty that derive from classical aesthetics and are represented by similar qualities to those included by Bakhtin as belonging to the 'classical body' in its material form - 'smooth-textured', 'symmetrical', 'monumental', 'spiritualized'. This can be demonstrated as specifically applicable to the predominant aesthetics within what is coming to be recognized as mainstream gay male culture where smooth-skinned bodies with well-defined musculature, hard 'six pack' pectorals, huge biceps, bulging chest muscles and hard and large penises are depicted in monumental poses. The enormous

popularity of the 'Mr Gay UK' Competition (the 1998 winner of which is shown in Plate 9) and the ever-increasing number of male strippers at gay male venues evidence that this is a growth area in terms of entertainment. It also reflects the perception within homoerotic art that the idealized, perfect, beautiful male form is to be 'god-like' - arguably an inheritance from Graeco-Roman statues of heroes and gods. What once was confined to the realms of art is now being realized within popular gay male culture. One major way in which the 'beautiful body' is able to remain within the mainstream aesthetic and yet be queered is for it to be decorated with tattoos (Plates 10 and 11).

These kinds of body images are not employed in the work of the Queer performers in this study. By their very nature these images are embedded within the dominant sexual-gender class system as being 'masculine' and none of these male performers are concerned with them. In their rejection of the mainstream gay aesthetic they employ images that are rejected by this aesthetic culture: Divine David and his 'anarcho-gothic' presentation; Titti La Camp and Lizzie Drip in their caricatures of the round, the fat, the twisted and with their gothic body images which rely heavily on the 'female' and, therefore, invite the criticism of misogyny; Dave Lynn and Malitza and their masculine-feminine amalgamations; Ivan Cartwright celebrating the status of the 'Queen', who has no real place in the gay male culture except as 'camp' or as an entertaining and outrageous travesty. None of these performers embody the idealized image which is the desirable sexual object of the main-stream gay male culture.

As far as the female performers in this study are concerned, Amy Lamé and Marisa Carr have very deliberately employed images of the female body that are not part of

contemporary ideas of female beauty. Marisa Carr's portrayals of the body are a paradoxical mix. Dolly Blue (Plate 5) and Bloody Pearl (p115) are both seductive, based on archetypes of women in entertainment that are constructed for 'the male gaze', but are also 'monsters', 'bizarre' and 'grotesque' (p122). Either way, Carr's use of these body images is intended to subvert cultural norms.

With Amy Lamé, the performances revolve around her own body as being that of a 'big, femme lesbo' (p102) who is outside the bounds of lesbian culture (not on account of her physical body but on account of her image) and also outside the parameters of acceptability in a wider society where being fat is not only considered unhealthy but also unattractive and outside the norm.

In *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*, Lamé's targets were the established lesbian culture, in which she perceived herself as having no role to play, and the predominant consumerist aesthetic from which fat people are abjected. The show originated out of her sense of frustration and isolation from the lesbian community. Lamé says,

....I had felt for some time that I didn't belong and that I wasn't really wanted. My coming out was from reading all these books on lesbian theory, lesbian novels, this, that and the other thing....I felt I identified culturally with gay men and I felt like I was a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body because there was no place for me it seemed in the lesbian world and lesbian culture at that time. (p109)

The performance opens with Lamé's speech about Doris Day:

Doris Day Changed My Life!

All ginghamed-up with a fabulous hairdo - a girl with a capital G if ever I saw one! I mean all that make up and hairspray... girl talk, pillow talk, pink puffy pillows and glow in the dark stars on the bedroom ceiling.

Doris Day and Judy Garland become the icons around whom Lamé can focus her dissent

from the lesbian community of the eighties and early nineties (p100)

In the pre-‘lipstick lesbian’ days Lamé’s stance had an impact on the debate within lesbian culture. While the show did not contain images that embodied ‘transgendered’ identity, Lamé saw herself as being gender transgressive as far as the ‘gender-costume’ of the prevalent lesbian culture was concerned. In the show, she expresses her sense of being an ‘outcast’(p103) and her sense of rejection with regard to her size. At one point in the show she relates an experience when she goes to *Angel’s* costumiers trying to find a size 22 flamenco dress in which to perform:

He asked me what size. I responded proudly, ‘22’ and he said, ‘Oh it’s for you!’. He escorted me to the flamenco dress department, showed me a flounce or two and said, ‘Sorry, none in your size. These costumes are made for dancers.’(p101)

The message is clear - fat women are not dancers. The costumier’s was called *Angel’s*, which is not insignificant. The word has associations with an aesthetic in which thin-bodied women are prioritized for their perceived elegance and ethereality, qualities which are considered to be appropriate both to angels and dancers in a culture that tends to reject the fat woman. During the speech she has brought out some very large pieces of gingham which she drapes and pins around herself to make a very bright, festive flamenco dress. She then proceeds to sing and dance along with a tape recording of *I Feel Pretty* from *West Side Story*. In this short enactment, Lamé presents both the abjected status of the fat body from the ‘classical’ aesthetic of the traditional culture of dance as well as one possible resolution which is the creation of a self-determined, ‘home made’ alternative, an active sense of empowerment.

In all the above-mentioned ways, then, it is possible to suggest that the body images in these performances are those which are antithetical to the dominant contemporary aesthetic, which is formed around idealized images inherited from Europe's classical cultures, if not from the Renaissance; images that contain some of the characteristics which Bakhtin lists as also being within the classical canons of aesthetics within the medieval frame.

*ii) the grotesque body as 'multiple and changing'*

Insofar as the parameters of this study and the concerns of the performers go we could expect the body as 'multiple and changing' to be presented in terms of the embodiment of gender. As embodiments of 'gender fluidity' and the refusal to be contained within the body-bound categories of gender, some gender transgressive Queer performances already include the presentation of the body as multiple and changing. They include Gloria Theatre's production of *Sarrasine* in which the one character of La Zimbanella was portrayed, simultaneously, by three performers of differing genders but presenting a variety of gender roles *at the same time*, urging the spectator to multiple possibilities of thought and feeling around the nuances of embodied gender and identity. A presentation of the gendered body as 'multiple and changing' is also evidenced in Doo Cot's production of *Peacock* where a) one of the male characters in the story is represented by a puppet whose gender is not bodily identified in any explicit way but who is presented as a male performer in drag, b) a visible female puppeteer manipulates the puppet representing the main male character but, because she is constantly seen, is a visible part of the embodiment of the character and c) a visible male performer (in drag) provides the singing voice of the drag performer puppet

(Plate 8). The total strategy here is to present a main character in the narrative from a position that is not a unified one (in gender terms) but one which embodies a multiplicity of genders. However, the multiplicity of genders embodied in the characters in *Sarrasine* and *Peacock* are not all present within the one body. They are shown through several bodies and in various gender combinations and are, perhaps, not adequate evidence of the 'multiple and changing' aspects of the grotesque body indicated by Bakhtin. In response, it could be said that such an argument confines the reading of the 'grotesque body' to a single body, which, in itself, is a closed frame. When Queer performers employ strategies of the kind utilized in *Sarrasine* and *Peacock* they embody gender fluidity in what could be called a *multiple-bodied performance* and this as a *performance strategy* partakes of the 'multiple and changing' nature of the grotesque body.

An example of the 'multiple and changing' nature of the grotesque body being evidenced in Queer performance within a single body can be seen in the performances of Lizzie Drip. In the pastiche performance as 'Diana Ross' (p76), Lizzie very suddenly takes out the set of giant false teeth and starts to scratch herself with them. The teeth snap like maracas and for a brief moment they 'turn into' maracas, then into a hair comb and back into a body scratcher with which 'Diana' scratches her crotch in a crudely suggestive manner before popping them into her mouth. The connection made with the false teeth between the mouth area and the crotch area grotesquely bring together two organs, the mouth and the genitals, in an interplay with each other which suggests pleasure, oral sex, and disgust, if the crotch is associated with the act of urination. The multiple levels on which this piece works together with the contrast of

opposites, pleasure and disgust, make this piece comic and grotesque. Later on in the same performance as 'Diana', Lizzie's (false) arms extend and stretch to about ten feet in total length while she whirls around on one spot to the taped music of *Reach Out and Touch* by Diana Ross and The Supremes. Again, when Lizzie represents both Montserrat Caballé and Freddie Mercury in one body (p78), she sticks her tongue out to the audience and her gigantic bust opens as a small puppet head of Freddie Mercury pops out of one of her 'breasts' like a Jack-in-the-Box. As the performance progresses, the animated puppet head of Freddie Mercury suckles at her 'breast'. Not only do we have, here, the changing shape and dimensions of the body but we also have the opposite performance strategies to those employed in *Sarrasine* and *Peacock*. Those strategies employed a multiplicity of bodies and gender combinations to represent *one* character. In Lizzie Drip's performance of Caballé-Mercury we find two characters with differing gender attributes being embedded in the one body. We no longer see Lizzie Drip, Caballé or Freddie Mercury but a body which is a composite of all three - Lizzie Drip (the male performer in drag), Caballé (the female character being represented by the drag performer's body) and Freddie Mercury (the male character who has emerged from but remains attached to the 'breast'). The exaggerated shapes, use of gadgets and puppets, the juxtaposition of male and female gender indicators as well as identities, together with the heightened element of surprise, make this Queer performance grotesque in appearance as well as comic.

In some of the performances the 'multiple and changing' nature of the grotesque body is evidenced in the changeable nature of specific body parts as when Dave Lynn removes one of his 'breasts' and changes its function from representing a body part, the

breast, to representing first a Jewish hat and then a hamburger (p61), or when Bloody Pearl's 'vagina', in Marisa Carr's performance (p117), is also the source from which various strings of pearls are produced in order to seduce Bloody Pearl's intended victims. These instances of the multiple and changing nature of specific body parts also involve the performer performing bodily functions associated with them and I will return to look at these in greater detail in the following section on *grotesque behaviour and body processes*.

### *iii) The contrast of opposites*

I have said earlier in this chapter that my definition of Grotesque incorporates a sense of the contrast of opposites, in much the same vein as Marina Warner has suggested in that it involves the co-existence of 'fascination and disgust' (*ibid.* p254). The fundamental presentation of contrasting opposites in these performances involves the *play* with both male and female gender indicators *at the same time*, as I have already mentioned in previous chapters, evidenced in the performances of Malitza, for instance, where Michael Topping presents the image of a somewhat dowdy female wearing face make-up but with the 'shadow' of his beard left unshaven. There are, however, other levels where contrary images are presented side by side in these performances, some of which involve the parodying of established gender roles, institutions and the traditional mores of what is perceived to be a society founded on the heterosexual hegemony and which are there to be 'queered'.

Titti La Camp (p45) presents a nun, an image that is traditionally associated with reverence, self-restraint and with the established mores of the Church, as a chaotic and

heavily inebriated creature who whirls drunkenly to the song *One Day At A Time, Sweet Jesus*, the words of which form some of the affirmations of the 12 steps treatment utilized in the rehabilitation of substance abusers. A similar contrast of the image of a nun with its opposite quality of irreverence and provocation is evidenced in the image of Mother Lubricious of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence where she is used as an image promoting World Aids Day. Mother Lubricious says in interview:

it's a picture of a nun, right? And it's a nun with a bit of a wink in her eye! Rather like the nun from Hell. (p88)

Lizzie Drip's performances are centred around several parts of the body and processes relating to the lower bodily stratum, with an emphasis on the mouth, the tongue, the breasts, the genital areas and the buttocks, and contain examples of scatological play. Here, the contrast of opposites involves the breast areas of Lizzie Drip's Dolly Parton costume (p72). The breast image is traditionally associated with roundness and softness, with nourishment for the infant who is fed by its mother and with sensual pleasure for the lover. However, in this performance the breasts end in mouths, bright red lips surrounding shining teeth, which have been sewn on to the bodice. As Lizzie dances, the mouths flop from side to side with the tongues springing out and the teeth snapping. The contrast of the wholesome quality of the round breasts together with the harsh, snapping quality of the teeth makes the image grotesque as well as comic.

### **Grotesque Behaviour and Body Processes**

Bakhtin attributes the essential role in the grotesque body to 'those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body in which it conceives a new, second body' (*ibid.* p317). In his catalogue of these parts he

ascribes primary importance to the bowels and the phallus considering that they are ‘predominantly subject to hyperbolization’, which is a characteristic of the Grotesque. He goes on to list the mouth, the genital organs, the anus, the nose, as these are parts of the body through which ‘the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome’, through which the body ‘swallows and is itself swallowed by the world’ (*ibid.* p317). He excludes other parts such as the buttocks and the eyes, except when they are protruding and bulbous, as he counts the eyes as expressing ‘an individual, so to speak, self-sufficient life which is not essential to the grotesque’ (*ibid.* p316). His concentration on orifices and passages that open the body to the rest of world is consistent with his basic premise of the Grotesque based on his reading of the Rabelaisian texts. He also excludes specifically female parts such as the womb (though he mentions pregnancy several times) and the breasts. The womb is, after all, an enclosed space but it can be seen as having ‘swallowed’ part of the world outside it in order to become involved in the process of pregnancy - and Bakhtin does include pregnancy in the processes of the lower bodily stratum. The breasts and posterior are also subject to hyperbolization through exaggerations of roundness and largeness.

I think Mary Russo is correct when she indicates in *The Female Grotesque* (1994, p63) that Bakhtin’s ‘failure to acknowledge and incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic’ results in his notion of the Female Grotesque being undeveloped. She offers her category of the ‘female grotesque’ as being ‘crucial to identity-formation for both men and women as a space of risk and abjection’ (*ibid.* p12), arguing that the identities of the ‘male grotesques’ she selected to feature in her book are ‘produced through an association with the feminine as the body marked by

difference' (*ibid.* p15). I suggest, however, that gender transgressive Queer performers, male and female, with performance agenda that include not only the disruption of gender categories but the crisis of category itself, can only effectively embody this transgression of gender by *playing* with both 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes *together* and would not be adequately read from a feminist agenda which is founded in the soil of categorical gender difference. To view the multi-gendered, multi-layered embodiments in *Sarrasine*, *Peacock* or in Lizzie Drip's performance of Caballé-Mercury as examples of 'male' or 'female' would be to subject them to the very gender-categorical reading that is being questioned.

To return to Bakhtin's consideration of 'those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body in which it conceives a new, second body' (*ibid.* p317), I wish now to look at the extent to which the work of these performers incorporates *grotesque behaviour*, insofar as such behaviour is the performance of bodily functions involving the parts of the body highlighted in Bakhtin's criteria, and the *body processes* involved in Bakhtin's notion of 'grotesque realism'. In this exploration I will consider the extent to which these performers

- i) show a concern with organs and functions of the 'lower bodily stratum' and the products of these bodily functions such as filth, vomit, excrement, and bodily fluids and the processes of degradation (bringing down to earth);
- ii) incorporate the processes of transformation and renewal such as copulation, birth, death and rebirth that Bakhtin identifies as being integral to the nature of the 'grotesque body'.

I will also, as I deal with each of the above criteria, include a consideration of the extent

to which the contrast of opposites is evidenced in these performances from the viewpoint of performed bodily functions.

*i) Organs and Functions of the Lower Bodily Stratum*

Returning to Bakhtin's grotesque body, he lists the orifices that are predominantly featured in images in Rabelais' texts which are associated with food, drink - their consumption, digestion and evacuation- and sexual life as these are the products, activities and processes involving the lower bodily stratum. This short list expands to include the processes of eating and drinking and their hyperbolic aspects of over-indulgence - gourmandizing, and drinking to intoxication - copulation and pregnancy. The list includes the organs primarily associated with these processes, the mouth, (which I am expanding to include the tongue), the nose, the eyes (when bulbous and protruding), the belly, the bowels, the anus and the genital organs. I am expanding this list to include the breasts and the buttocks. Also, associated with these processes of the lower bodily stratum are various activities and movements - sucking, licking, swallowing, farting, vomiting, penetrating, intruding, extruding, protruding, urinating and excreting - and various products of these processes - solid and liquid food, alcohol, vomit, urine, excrement, filth, bile, dirt and all degraded substances - together with the language (including oaths, curses etc.) that is rooted in these processes and their products. As the process of degradation also involves disease, sickness and death, included in the list would be various symptoms of disease, stages of rotteness and decomposition, corpses and the symbols of death and the underworld. I suggest that there is abundant evidence of these criteria of the grotesque body present in gender transgressive Queer performance.

Richard Byrne's performances as Titti La Camp seem like a catalogue of aspects of the 'lower bodily stratum'. As the drunken nun (p45), Titti combines acrobatic clowning with burlesque choreography. She leaps and whirls around, lifts her habit to expose two bare, hairy legs and extracts a large bottle of gin/vodka which she proceeds to drink while miming to the words, her head shaking constantly, her mouth open, her tongue lolling from side to side as she leaps and whirls around the stage in a frenzied dance. She brandishes the bottle of gin/vodka in the air, drenching herself, the audience and the stage until it is so wet that dancing turns into a sliding back and forth across the stage. She trips, slips, collides into the wall at the back of the stage area and continues whirling and drinking until the bottle is empty, her habit is soaking and the stage is completely wet.

Food, drink and the regurgitation of these feature prominently in much of Titti La Camp's work. The performance (based around Karen Carpenter's song *I'm On The Top of the World*) focuses on bulimia and presents a huge variety of lower bodily functions and processes (p47). In Titti's piece centred around the song *Feed The Birds* from *Mary Poppins* images of food, waste and sexual activity merge together within the context of the song (p50). Titti's most Gothic grotesque piece, which also incorporates somewhat ghoulish images of death, is her performance based around Olivia Newton-John's song *Totally Devoted to You* (p49), in which she enacts various unsuccessful means of death or suicide. The most prominent image in this piece is at a point when she opens her mouth wide having chewed on a concealed blood pellet. The blood streams out of her mouth, down her chin, throat and white dress as she continues to 'mime' the words of the song, shaking her body about in a hyperbolic display of 'death throes' as she makes

her exit.

Lizzie Drip's performances are centred around several parts of the body and processes relating to the lower bodily stratum. I have already mentioned her piece which is focused around Dolly Parton (p73). Here, Lizzie's entire bosom lurches into the air, swings madly outwards to the left, and then to the right. The breasts suddenly contract again. Each expansion and contraction takes them further and further and upwards and outwards till her entire bosom seems to have a life of its own - the breasts flaying up and down with the teeth chattering and the tongues lolling about madly. The flapping, licking movements of the tongues together with the sucking movements of the lips and the chattering, biting movements of the teeth produce an effect that is a mixture of the surreal, the comic and the grotesque. The images involved in this piece could be read as embodiments of misogynistic fear translated into a bitter mockery of the female by portraying the breasts as frightening, sadistic and monstrous. They can also be read as the celebratory embodiment of insatiable infantile desire within the unconscious of all people - the id - released and given free expression in the heightened forms of the Grotesque.

Lizzie's caricatured portrayal of Judy Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (p73) provides an abundance of images playing with food, excrement, and urine focusing on the breasts, the arm-pits, the tongue and the genital areas. The focus shifts constantly from human food to animal food, food to excrement, from liquid waste (urine) to solid waste (dog dirt), from the dog sucking the breasts (nurture) to the dog nibbling at the crotch (sex), from the performer being the receiver of degraded matter to the audience

being the receivers of degraded matter, from the innocent, idealized illusion of Dorothy being 'over the rainbow' to the down to earth images of the company present being urinated and defecated over. The piece is a simple but exemplary embodiment of the process of degradation presented in the genre of the comic grotesque.

In Lizzie Drip's piece focusing on Carmen Miranda (p74), she uses bananas in a performance style that combines clowning and slap-stick. The piece emphasizes the sucking, swallowing and regurgitating processes involving the mouth and the genital areas while Lizzie dances to Carmen Miranda's song *I-I-I-I-I-Love You Very Much*. It is a celebration and a comical criticism of oral sex and its place in Queer sexuality. The banana's obvious correlation with the penis, its length, girth and shape, has given it a special place in traditional comedy and clowning performance. While its encasement is a skin that can be peeled (unzipped) allows for identification with unpleasant surprises, the unknown and the threatening (knives in sheaths, guns in holsters, penises in trousers), its bright colour, yellow or green or red (in the case of the plantain), heightens its association with celebration, levity, mirth and joy. The phrase 'going bananas', meaning going out of control, has a similar meaning to the word 'zany' which derives from the *zanni* (clowning tricksters) of *commedia dell' arte*. What Lizzie Drip does in this piece is not innovative at all. It has an immediate correlation with the comic grotesque. As Sean, who performs as Lizzie Drip, is a male performer, the question may and probably will be raised as to whether or not this is merely misogynistic mockery of Josephine Baker and Carmen Miranda. Any answer to that question will need to take into account that the phenomenon of Baker and Miranda is further complicated by the cultural context in which they were working as black women

performers - a culture in which implicitly racist perceptions led to the exoticization of black and coloured performers. In addition to this, as Warner has pointed out, ‘the temptation for Josephine Baker and Carmen Miranda lay in the power accorded to them by the perception of their sexuality’ (Warner *ibid.* p368). Sean, as Lizzie Drip, can be read as mocking, not the images of Baker and Miranda, but the performances of male strippers playing to both gay male and female audiences (on ‘hen-nights’, for example) who disrobe and use volunteers on the stage in very similar ways. By *not* performing a strip tease act, presenting in drag and using bananas, Lizzie Drip is able to enact a Queer ‘send up’ and at the same time a grotesque celebration of the phallic worship in gay male culture by using strategies derived from traditional burlesque.

*ii) Transformation and renewal*

Marisa Carr and The Dragon Ladies’ performance of *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* (see Appx. B p115 ), a scripted piece using text, dance and visual imagery, was a subversion of the story of Bluebeard. For the character of Dolly Blue (Plate 5), Amanda Moss designed and made Marisa Carr a false skin which had over- large breasts and a vagina in the shape of a large mouth with full red lips and teeth built into the crotch area. On her head she wore a head-dress of twelve peacock feathers. Dolly Blue’s opening monologue places her well within the territory of the Grotesque. She enters ‘like a marionette’ and delivers the speech in an oratorical and declamatory style:

Dolly Blue! Dolly Blue!  
 The proud peacock Lady, the comical whore!  
 Who is unfamiliar with the wanton Dolly Blue?  
 Like a blue china doll with short chubby fingers and wiry tangled hair,  
 She flutters her glass eyes at any passer-by,

All twelve of them you know protruding from her head!  
 Her make-believe bones lead a childish parade.  
 My powder blue lady with fierce bleeding lips  
 Seduces you to her from the rudely lit stage.  
 See close what you want to see, feel what you paid for,  
 The comical whore!  
 Laugh whilst you writhe, your wet undergarments are curiously sore.  
 The proud peacock lady, the comical whore.  
 (p354)

The underlying themes are grotesque - something has been invaded, oppressed, something has been destroyed. Out of that destruction there is an underground, almost subterranean, movement in order to resurrect some kind of newness and that newness has to be transformational. The themes of transgression and transformation are integral to the story of Dolly Blue. From the outset, Dolly Blue is paradoxical. She is a 'blue china doll' who 'flutters her eyes at any passer-by', a seductive 'blue whorish creature' whose 'make-believe bones lead a childish parade' but she is also grotesque and dangerous - the 'comical whore' with 'fierce bleeding lips' and 'her humour of marvellous decay' who seduces men to go 'down in the dirt with Dolly Blue and her erotic danger play'. Dolly Blue is the 'peacock lady'. Carr says,

The peacock is male so it can be read as a parade of male sexuality through the female - an aggressive, flamboyant, showy sexuality that is made for men, for the male gaze. (p121)

It is Dolly's initial transgression in refusing to comply with Bluebeard's rule not to enter his chamber that leads to Bluebeard chopping off her legs. By doing so he is destabilizing her and killing her lower half. However, her refusal to comply with his rule exposes his murders - his dead wives whose corpses have been covered with porcelain - 'china dolls' - an embodiment of the male's oppression of the female.

The second transformation of Dolly Blue, the 'colossal monster' Violet Rose (Plate 6)

is also grotesque, part ‘bird-fish demon’, ‘evil octopi-peacock’, with ‘ten eyes flashing like a fruit machine’ and ‘adorned with monstrous purple flowers’. The third transformation, Bloody Pearl, is partly oyster flesh, partly tears of blood, partly mother-of-pearl and partly tattooed skin that she has ripped off the bodies of sailors. However, while Bloody Pearl is a ‘she-monster’ peeling skins of her male victims, she is also a martyr who gives her life to destroy ‘the sins of men’ which can be read as the system in which sexual categories become a source of institutionalized oppression:

The outsider, the survivor.  
 Never to forget the evil deeds of Captain Blue,  
 She stalks the earth in search of retribution  
 Misunderstood and ostracized,  
 Lonely and depraved.  
 The mythological martyr madame,  
 The night stalking whore,  
 Down by the docks,  
 Our Lady of Survival (p359)

Marisa Carr intends her images to be grotesque and to embody grotesque processes while also commenting about the use of female archetypes. She says,

....my subject matter and my mental self are coming from a mixture of my interest in sexual archetypes, women and their sexual archetypes and women’s archetypes in entertainment - the carnivalesque, side-show, street-woman or the comical whore and then also the darker, more monstrous woman, animal-woman...What I’ve tried to do is look at traditional narratives and mix them with fairy tales, popular mythologies and these archetypes of women as sexually bizarre beings that are complex and interesting, partly grotesque, partly death-like, partly male and partly female. (p122)

Carr repeats her intention to incorporate this ‘partly male, partly female’ mix within the character of Dolly Blue in an interview conducted by David Kerekes for a publication called *HeadPress* (No. 17) in which she says,

Dolly Blue is a bawdy, blue showgirl, but she’s also like a China doll: naive and breakable. And a peacock - a very elegant, feminine-looking bird that’s actually a male. Both male and female at the same time, and funny and whorish. It’s kind of playing with the whole showgirl thing. Dolly Blue is parading female

sexuality with a kind of aggression. (David Kerekes, 'The Grotesque Burlesque Interview', *HeadPress. No 17*)

The theme of Marisa Carr's performance as *Mademoiselle Lefort* in the *St. Valentine's Promenade Performance* is the freak and the outcast - the original bearded lady from the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens of the early 1800s. Set in the underground, dark, damp railway arches at Vauxhall the piece's themes are loss and renewal after the ultimate state of degradation - death. She is the wandering spirit of *Mademoiselle Lefort*, desperate and alone, in mourning, in grief. Her unhappy spirit has been languishing for her past. 'The gardens have been obliterated now for a long time. She is lost in the modern Vauxhall neighbourhood looking for her roots'. Here the male element (the beard) is 'growing' on the female identity (*Mademoiselle*) as opposed to the bearded man in a dress image which is a common grotesque image and which was featured in Ulrike Ottinger's film *Freak Orlando* (Plate 12).

The death theme is actually presented as a 'live' one. Certainly the pleasure gardens, the freak show and *Mademoiselle's* friends have gone. Nevertheless her spirit is presented as alive and looking to the past 'for her roots' but also forwards to the future - the questions of identity, gender and the roles and functions of entertainment and performance. Can the queer folk she meets help her to an understanding of herself as a freak, an outsider, in British culture'?

The transformation theme in this piece which moves from a degraded and destroyed state (death) to one of regeneration and renewal in this performance is present in the

interaction between the ‘dead’ late 19th century Mademoiselle Lefort and the ‘live’ 20th century audience at the promenade performance. The series of questions and statements that the lost, lonely and desolate freak Mademoiselle Lefort makes to the audience starts from her position of not remembering who, where or what she is through a position where she remembers with pain and tears her living suffering to a final position of trust in the audience of strangers and the realization of her identity. The performance is also part of a physical journey made by the performer and audience from the dark, damp, underworld of the railway arches to the well-lit, open-air street.

The themes of empowerment, reclamation and renewal lie at the heart of Amy Lamé’s performances of *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian’s Body* and *Cum Manifesto*. Both productions are centred around a critique of cultures in which ‘freaks’ and ‘outcasts’ are marginalized and extruded together with an emphasis on regeneration and renewal by presenting positive affirmations of self-worth for the abjected and outlawed individuals and communities.

In *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian’s Body*, (p99) Lamé says,

This show is about me. Amy Ruth Caddle Gallego Rufino Olé Glamour Lamé. Plump girl in spectacles. David Caseate fan. Lesbian Don Quixote. Camp queen. In search of Ms. Adventure, knight errantry, and my Dulcinea. As a gay man trapped in a lesbian’s body.

By using eight names in the show Lamé is acknowledging that both her public persona (Amy Lamé) and real self (Amy Ruth Caddle) are implicated in the show’s contents. The show becomes a vehicle for resolving the integral problem encountered by ‘outcasts’ and ‘rejectees’ from the dominant prescriptions of society, whether those

prescriptions are the aesthetic values based on traditional ideas of beauty or the alternative values of a reactionary neo-orthodoxy, such as gay/lesbian culture. In the final section of the show, this problem is re-stated and the audience is included in a collective enactment of positive affirmations as the embodiment of a resolution that is both transformational and celebratory (p103). Having made her own personal statement a few speeches earlier - 'Tonight's the night I swish MY hips!' - and again in this last speech, she invites the audience to do the same. She leads them into audience participation over a taped version of *Aren't you glad you're you?*

Now I want you all to do the same thing, Go on. Say it...  
 Now give your selves a pat on the back.  
 It's OK to like yourself.  
 Give yourselves a hug. Go on.....

The audience begins to respond gradually and, only when they are all participating, does Lamé deliver her final speech in which she says:

This world is full of too many people ready to put you down for who and what you are. Just remember, like my ol' Mom always said, what goes around, comes around. It's true! Another thing my Mom always said is you can't love anyone else unless you love yourself first! So I want all of you, each and every one of you, to leave here this evening with a smile on your face, a song on your lips, a dance in your step and a big, fat bubble of love in your heart! (p104)

This call for 'an expression of love' could be read as a light, cabaret-style performance of a serious statement that is both celebratory and transformational in its intention, which is based on Queerness but is inclusive of all the 'dispossessed'; or it could be critiqued as an indulgent, performer-centred enactment with no wider implications than being an enjoyable entertainment strategy. To take the first position would be to invite the criticism of being an, albeit inadvertent, apologist for this form of Queer cabaret whereas maintaining the second position would, perhaps, be in danger of marginalizing

the embodied voices of those who see themselves as being socially rejected.

*Cum Manifesto* culminates in Lamé's vision of a utopian place for 'outcasts' and 'freaks'. It is a development from the question she poses in *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*: 'And where does that leave me? Where does a camp, drag, gay man trapped in a big femme lesbo body fit in?'. The answer is provided in the section entitled 'Club of Outcasts' at the end of *Cum Manifesto* (p109). This vision is one informed by the inclusiveness of the term Queer. It presents an egalitarian vision of sexuality in which there are no hierarchies based on gender or sexual classes. In this sense, it could be said to be 'proletarian' and 'universal'. However, it is a 'club' and, therefore, a kind of community that has its boundary, its 'members', its entry criteria (to be an 'outsider' and an 'outcast') and, in this sense it is not 'universal' or 'proletarian' in the sense that Bakhtin's body politic is 'of all the people'. It is also a community 'without rules because we've broken them all already' which is resonant of Rabelais' House of Thélème in *Gargantua* where 'their life was regulated not by laws, statutes or rules but according to their free will and pleasure' and where 'in their rules there was only one clause: DO WHAT YOU WILL' (Rabelais. *Gargantua*. Ch.57). In this sense, the embodied vision shares something of the nature of the transformational and regenerative aspects of Bakhtin's grotesque realism.

### **Summary**

Having established my working definition of the term 'grotesque' as a combination of Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' and the contrast of opposites, the 'ugly' as 'beautiful', the 'painful' as 'comic', the 'monstrous' as 'delightful', I prefaced my exploration of

the gender transgressive images in these performances in relation to the Grotesque with an outline of various notions concerning the Dramatic Body and Queer embodiment.

I have suggested that in gender transgressive Queer performance, the performers can be seen as offering their bodies publicly in performance as embodiments of the performers' personal questioning, rejecting or queering of gender identity as stable, body-bound state. In this sense, I suggested that their bodies could be seen as a convention-set within which they may also be seen as enacting their political and artistic ideas as well as strategies regarding performance itself.

After presenting some general notions and theories of the Grotesque I have explored the extent to which the images in the work of these performers relate to Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body' by analyzing them in terms of *grotesque appearance*, where the grotesque body is the antithesis to the classical body and where the body is presented as 'multiple and changing'; and *grotesque behaviour and body processes*, where they show a concern with organs and functions of the 'lower bodily stratum' and the products of these bodily functions such as filth, vomit, excrement, and bodily fluids and the processes of degradation (bringing down to earth); and where these performances incorporate the processes of transformation and renewal such as copulation, birth, death and rebirth that Bakhtin identifies as being integral to the nature of the 'grotesque body'. Bakhtin's analysis of 'the grotesque body' is, I have suggested, of some value in being able to understand and frame the comically grotesque nature of the imagery in these performances which arises from the transgressive contrast of opposites, of the 'monstrous' as 'delightful', of the 'disgusting' as 'fascinating', of the 'ugly' as

‘beautiful’. This relates to the use of parody and travesty that is contained within the ‘topsy-turvy’ quality of the images in these performances as well as to the kind of laughter together with discomfort that they engender. I have also suggested that these performances belong to a cultural tradition from the Feast of Fools and carnival through burlesque to Queer performance. In the next chapter I shall consider the extent to which they can be said to relate to carnival and the carnivalesque.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE QUEER CARNIVAL

Exponents of Queer performance and drag cabaret performance have either been placed or place themselves within a politically or socially subversive context, some of them identifying the developmental roots of their performance as originating in the political aspects of carnival and others claiming a relationship with Fools and Clowns. In this chapter I look at some of the ideas within the theory of carnival and whether or not Queer Parades like the Mardi Gras in New York and Sydney and Gay/Lesbian Pride events in the UK and Europe can be considered to be 'carnival'. By 'carnival' I mean public occasions with peripatetic or processional elements which are comic celebrations that have a dimension of social/ political expression and embody aspects of transformation. I use the term 'carnavalesque' to refer to events and performances that have some similarities to carnival but which may not be considered to be carnival in the strictest sense of that term.

In the previous chapter I offered an analysis of gender transgressive Queer performance in relation to Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body'. In this chapter I will present a brief overview of various notions of carnival, starting with Bakhtin's idea of carnival folk culture. Surveying some commentaries on and critiques of Bakhtin's model of carnival, e.g. Bristol, Fiske, Kershaw, I consider the re-readings that the term 'carnival' has undergone. Its application to the socio-political 'counter-culture' of the sixties and seventies has necessitated that I employ a conceptual rather than a literal approach to Bakhtin's initial premises. I will then go on to look at gender transgressive Queer performances, including Queer parades and marches, in the light of these concepts,

suggesting that a number of characteristics of carnival are also present in these performances. I will consider these performances in relation to the following aspects of carnival under separate headings:

- i) carnival as public occasion and performance;
- ii) carnival as *communitas*;
- iii) carnival as the subversive inversion of normality, what Robert Weimann has called 'topsy-turvydom' (Weimann, 1978, p20).

### **Carnival and the carnivalesque**

For Bakhtin medieval carnival was an embodiment of both material and social transformation and, as a manifestation of the culture of 'folk carnival humour', it contained many aspects of the 'grotesque body'. He associated 'folk carnival humour' with a kind of laughter which he identified as festive laughter. The laughter of renewal as the essential nature of the grotesque body was a universal one of abundance, growth, health and renewal, representing all the people and not concerned with the individual or the 'bourgeois ego'. While stressing the paradoxical nature of carnival laughter in that it was not 'bare negation' but had both a 'denying' aspect as well as a reviving or renewing one, Bakhtin identified three main characteristics. Firstly, carnival laughter is 'festive'. Secondly, it is of all the people - 'directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants' and, thirdly, it is ambivalent - 'gay, triumphant' and 'mocking, deriding'. It 'asserts and it denies', it 'buries and revives'. He distinguishes between this kind of laughter and Kayser's view of 'grotesque laughter', which is 'laughter combined with bitterness which takes the grotesque form, acquires the traits of mockery and cynicism, and finally, becomes satanic' (Kayser cited in Bakhtin, *ibid.* p51), and

where ‘the gay, liberating, regenerating element of laughter’ is absent.

There are other writers on the subject of carnival whose ideas seem to have developed out of Bakhtin’s. In *Carnival and Theater* (1985), Michael Bristol points out the difficulty in applying the social categorical term ‘plebeian’ within the Renaissance frame to a notion of ‘the people’ as it exists outside that frame. He indicates that the term is broadly inclusive but

it does not correspond either to an abstract conception of a ‘unified populace’ or to the modern phenomenon known as ‘mass society’. It is unified by virtue of its exclusion from privileges of gentle birth. (Bristol, *ibid.* p42)

While the ‘common people’ had the common experience of being set apart from the nobility and those in positions of authority within the Church, they also experienced several ‘forms of social dissonance between themselves’ (*ibid.* p42). Bristol suggests that while Bakhtin’s concept of carnival seems to imply that ‘theater is the most vital institutional setting for literary and verbal creativity’ (*ibid.* p23), the implications are not followed through far enough, leading Bakhtin to focus on Rabelais’ written work rather than on drama to locate the manifestation of carnival, but he concedes that there are ‘no doubt circumstantial reasons’ for this. For Bristol, any exploration of the links that may exist between ‘popular culture, theater and dramatic literature’ in the Renaissance that is organized around the concept of carnival would need to consider ‘carnival as something much more than a system of images and transgressive devices’ and more as ‘a concrete social reality in the context of early modern Europe’ (*ibid.* p25). He also presents the seemingly paradoxical nature of carnival in its political function: that of a strategy to ensure social cohesion as well as a means of altering the status quo.

Bristol, like Bakhtin, attributes three main characteristics to carnival:

- a) it is a symbolic event that objectifies the ‘collective determination to conserve the authority of the community to set its own standards of behaviour and social discipline and to enforce those standards by appropriate means’;
- b) it is a manifestation of resistance to ‘imposed forms of domination’ but he qualifies this by saying that this is particularly when the domination is viewed as violating ‘customary norms of surveillance and social control’;
- c) it is ‘an idiom of social experimentation in which utopian fantasies are performed and collective desires for a better life are expressed’;

carnival is a manifestation of these three objectives and includes masquerades, travesty (cross-dressing) and ‘utopian imagery’ (Bristol, *ibid.* pp52-53).

Bristol takes an almost functionalist view of carnival and the manifestation of travesty within it, which is the main element of interest as far as this study is concerned. He acknowledges that travesty is ‘a general refusal of identity’ (*ibid.* p69) and he then moves on to mention the impermanence of identity in terms of the natural maturation process and the traditional structures of society. He says that ‘boys grow into men, apprentices become journeymen, maids become wives and widows’ (*ibid.* p70) almost as if this is equatable with the ‘refusal of identity’. Bristol is, of course, concerned about the reading of carnival as a concrete everyday reality in Elizabethan England and he presents cross-dressing as the plebeian culture’s response to the political and economic elites as well as to itself. There is no consideration here of travesty possibly being an expression of ‘the refusal of identity’ in a more fundamental and radical way. There is not enough consideration that, while medieval carnival may not have had collective

objectives that were oriented to gender transgressiveness as an alternative existential position, there might well have been gender transgressive individuals within that historical frame for whom travesty was an expression of their refusal of a categorical gender identity. Simply to view cross-dressing in the way presented by Bristol is to leave unacknowledged the social relations of gender and also to render invisible, marginal or non-existent any possibility that such travesty might embody some individuals' 'refusal of identity' in terms of gender. It is to imply that gender transgressive images and their performance dynamics in historical contexts need merely to be interpreted as metaphors for some other kind of process that is not to do with gender or as some form of theatrical strategy or convention where the gender or transgender issue is being utilized for some other purpose that the performer or dramatist may have. These are the kinds of assumptions that are frequently made by academics, writers and theorists whose analyses remain firmly within the limiting parameters of the heterosexual hegemonic frame and the effect of such assumptions is to perpetuate the invisibility/ marginalization of gender transgression as a deliberate oppositional position to the dominant culture. I am suggesting that if a model of a popular performance form or strategy, such as 'carnival' or 'travesty', frames that performance in a political/ historical context but does not sufficiently explore the social and power relations of gender, which include the existing social and power relations between those who conform to the gender binary and those who do not, then the model would have an undeveloped notion of gender transgressiveness and its importance within that political/historical context.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*

(1986) against the somewhat functionalist idea that carnival acts as a safety valve, a strategy for the continuance of the status quo, by allowing a temporary period of transgression from the norm in order that normality may be re-inforced later on (rather like some kind of authoritarian tactic expressed by the attitude of ‘letting them get it all off their chests so that we can all go to work as usual tomorrow’). They offer that ‘the presence of sharpened political antagonism...may often act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle’ (*ibid.* p14).

In *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) John Fiske, working from Bakhtin’s basic premises, presents some clear qualities of carnival: that it is subversive by its inversion of the norms of social institutions and structures, that it blurs the boundaries between participants and spectators, that it takes place in ‘real time’ in outside locations and public spaces, that it is pluralistic and paradoxical embracing contradictory positions and expressions, that it is by its very nature outside existing social and cultural institutions, that it celebrates the sexual and other bodily pleasures, that it expresses exaggerated images of normality in a grotesque and spectacular manner, that it manifests a free and anarchic spirit by its apparent non-compliance with rules, structures and authorized order. Tony Bennett writing in 1986, indicated that Bakhtin’s interest was

not the carnival tradition as such but the direction in which that tradition was made to point, the specific ways in which its cultural and ideological meaning was inflected, in being articulated to the progressive currents of the Renaissance humanism. (Bennett *et al.* p147)

It is this linkage between the carnival tradition and cultural and ideological contexts that informs Baz Kershaw’s distinction between the ‘contextualized’ and ‘decontextualized’

forms of carnival in *The Politics of Performance* (1992), the former relating to the community and socio-political levels from which carnival derives its ideological significance and the latter referring to ‘the carnival which has no roots in the developed organizational structures of an oppositional community’ (Kershaw, *ibid.* p71). Building on Fiske’s work on Bakhtin’s concepts, Kershaw suggests parallels between carnival and the counter-culture, a model of ‘oppositional action against hegemony’ (*ibid.* p39) out of which agit-prop and the ‘theatre of celebratory protest’ arose. However, he is concerned with a wide overview, as it were, of political and popular theatre. While he mentions the place of gay liberation within the oppositional counter-culture of the politically ‘left’ oriented movements and that of gay theatre amongst the categories of ‘community theatre’, he does not look specifically at the links between carnival and the Gay Liberation Front’s presentation of gender- transgressive images nor at the phenomenon of the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parades or street and park events which, I suggest, contributed to the development of what is now Queer performance.

### **i) Carnival as public occasion and performance**

Queer street events such as Gay and Lesbian Pride Marches and Parades in Europe and the USA or the Sydney Mardi Gras (which is globally acknowledged as the biggest Queer Parade in the world) can be considered to be both ‘carnival’ or ‘carnavalesque’, while it needs to be acknowledged that there are some differences between these parades and ‘carnival’. ‘Carnival’ has a ‘for-all-of-the-people’ agenda, as do the great carnivals in Venice, Rio and the Notting Hill Carnival in London where the spirit of festive celebration appears to predominate rather than any explicit opposition to

dominant hegemonies. However, the Queer parades are pluralistic and partake of the universal nature of carnival to the extent that they encompass every conceivable position and expression within Queer sexuality, complementary or contradictory, from various gay Christian denominations, through lesbian and gay Conservatives and Socialists, Queer disability, bisexual and transgender groups, lesbian and gay single parent groups, ethnic Queer groups (such as the Naz Project and Shakti), drag queens and S/M dykes. They do not, however, embrace the positions and expressions either of the extreme political 'right' or the dominant heterosexual hegemony and to this extent are not strictly 'universal'. The constant presence of political 'left' revolutionary groups such as The Socialist Workers Party and various Marxist organizations is a reminder of the proletarian agenda of the liberation movements that arose out of the late sixties and seventies from which the Queer parades have derived.

These Queer parades have also progressively included anyone who wishes to celebrate a sense of sympathetic solidarity with the various Queer communities. This phenomenal progression has brought this category of Queer event very close to the spirit of carnival. As such they are great occasions for the display of gender transgressive images. Here, the performances are spontaneous and anarchic, the carnivalesque nature of the parades undermining the distinction between observer and performer. They abound in a multiplicity of images of the body, presenting sexual, gustatory and excessive spectacle harking back to the Medieval Feast of Fools, exemplified for us at a Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade by the bearded man in the period dress (Plate 13) and his simple gender transgressive presentation of male and female indicators alongside each other. The parades and parties in the parks give scope for the expression of exaggerated images of

bodily form, such as the two fat drag-queens (Plate 14). The anarchic spirit of the parades also embraces the somewhat darker, more intense transgressive images such as the horned masked man in the black cloak (Plate 15), echoing the pre-Christian spirit of paganism as well as the celebration of the pleasure of pain, exemplified by the theatrical enactment on a float of women presenting aspects of sado-masochistic play (Plate 16). I suggest that a Gay and Lesbian Pride March can be considered to be a Queer carnival that is contextualized within the various Queer communities' oppositional ideology to what is regarded as the heterosexual class system. I shall return to the question of whether or not it is useful consider these Queer communities as *community* or as *communitas* later, in the section on carnival as *communitas*.

Amongst his aspects of carnival, Bakhtin includes 'ritual spectacles' and 'carnival pageants'. I have already mentioned the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Marches in connection with carnival and suggested that they are contextualized within the political ideologies of the various Queer communities. The numerous floats presenting static tableaux as well as enactments vary in content from the festive (Plate 17), where the delights of fun, sexual life and general gaiety are plainly expressed and celebrated, to those like the sado-masochistic dykes (Plate 16) where the more transgressive aspects of Queer sexuality are displayed. In the S/M enactment a variety of roles are represented by the performers: the dominatrix, the slave, the voyeur, the torturer and so on. The spine of the woman with her back to the camera is tattooed and presents a body image that relates to the skeleton under the skin and flesh which is particularly grotesque in quality. The woman in the black mask and the dominatrix in what looks like a rubber apron and gloves associate with the power that the masochist has

consentingly permitted them to have. The scene also suggests the scarring of flesh and the spillage of blood - some degree of liquid or solid matter that will be spent from the body. These are elements of the Grotesque. It can be argued that this is not so much comic or humorous as it is disturbing and unsettling. But the disturbing nature of this scene is precisely a result of the Queerness of the sexuality embodied within it. While it may not be a comic scene it is certainly a celebratory one. The faces and demeanours of the women are not expressing terror but pleasure and the effect is one of theatrical entertainment rather than of serious torture. It can also be argued that there is no gender-transgression displayed here and while this may be true in terms of masculine-feminine crossovers, there are no men in this scene. Women enacting the dominant role with other women can be seen as ascribing to themselves the traditionally dominant role ascribed to masculinity, and this, together with the fact that this is not a scene of heterosexual sado-masochistic images, makes it both Queer, gender transgressive and subversive. In neither of these floats are there any enactments or images that are properly reversive, in that 'normality' has not been up-ended. They are, however, scenes exemplifying and celebrating the Queer transgression in a spectacular manner.

The costumed participants on the parade present a vast array of images: the traditional carnival masked characters of the man in the feathered head-dress with his body draped with rainbow coloured boas, the colours of the Queer Nation flag (Plates 18 and 19); the women with the carnival mask (Plate 20); the androgynous woman in the rainbow-coloured hooped dress (Plate 21); the bearded man in the bright scarlet dress with a gauze skirt, red horns on his head, reminiscent of a devil (Plate 22); the man in the short black skirt and high leather boots (Plate 23), who presents a simple version of

traditional travesty and who retains his beard showing that he is not presenting as a woman nor as a drag Queen; the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, some of whom are in traditional Vatican 2 style nun's habits which have been enhanced with carnivalesque accessories, face paint, and spectacular make-up, one (Plate 24) retaining the beard and some participating in a spontaneous enactment involving a 'mistress and slave' scene with the slave on his knees with a dog-lead around his neck (Plate 25); the bizarre clownish 'dancer' (Plate 26) whose costume includes a wired and hooped skirt of pink netting, pink and black striped hose and leggings, yellow and black spotted high heeled shoes, clown face make-up and a brass tap inserted where a cod-piece would traditionally appear and who challenges categorization. All these make up a pageant of colourful gender transgressive Queer and subversive images and small spontaneous performances by individual participants that last from a few seconds to several minutes. These spontaneous performances are fleeting and are done 'on the move', within the procession of the parade, or in the parks, where the parades terminate in mass parties, where the performers themselves are peripatetic. The performers mingle with the general crowd who themselves become participants. The costumed participants, in turn, compose the 'audience' for other spontaneous enactments and displays from other performers. These, I suggest, are characteristics that are integral to carnival.

Examples of other outdoor street performances are the ceremonies and rituals of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The Joining Ceremony of EH and FA (p80) was performed on the streets of Covent Garden which is an actual street market. The ceremony is a private one, but so publicly executed that it becomes a piece of performance. Not only are the 'wedding guests' invited friends and relatives but they

also include shoppers, tourists and general passers-by. The location being outside a cafeteria that is also an art gallery sets the performance in the everyday world of commerce rather than in a space where the demarcation of audience and performers could be made more clear - as would, perhaps, be the case if the ceremony took place on the steps of Trafalgar Square or the centre of Hyde Park. Here it is in Covent Garden, in the heart of the marketplace. It also blurs the boundaries between the private and public domains, the real event in the lives of the two grooms and the theatrical performance of the ceremony conducted by gender transgressive nuns and monks who do not belong to the Christian Church but who utilize the effects of orthodoxy: bells, incense, censers and Vatican 2 style habits. I shall deal with the texts of both this Joining Ceremony and the Vestition Ceremony in a section on parodies.

While not comic in its nature or intention, Marisa Carr's performance as Mademoiselle Lefort in *The St. Valentine's Day Promenade Performance* was almost completely centred around her interaction with the audience. It is through a series of questions and answers - sometimes led by Carr, sometimes led by members of the audience, that we learn the historical background of the character who is the spirit of the original bearded lady from the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens of the early 1800s (p120). Here the audience is integral to the enactment at all stages: from the gradual discovery and revelation of Mademoiselle Lefort's identity and problem through to its resolution. The peripatetic nature of the performance is immediately relatable to street theatre events and carnival. The resolution of the piece - the integration of the freak into the Queer Club - can be read either as the performed embodiment of the collective celebratory and festive desires of Queer communities and individuals or as the subversive and oppositional

position that Queer culture takes in relation to normality and the dominant heterosexual hegemony. Whichever reading is preferred, this kind of gender transgressive Queer performance is immediately relatable to carnival in that it is public, spectacular and involves a journey where the audience is peripatetic.

## ii) Queer as *Communitas*, carnival as *Communitas*

I have already mentioned the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Parades in connection with carnival and suggested that they are contextualized within the political ideologies of the various Queer communities. As these communities have degrees of dissonance between themselves (ie the Gay Christian community and the transgendered community who disassociate themselves from the Gay Skinheads and the S/M dykes; the radical separatist lesbian community from the drag Queens), and as all the various Queer communities are all sections within the wider general community (society), it is, arguably, more useful and accurate to speak of Queer as *communitas*.

As far as Queer has been described as having an inclusive quality it seems to partake of the nature of Turner's *communitas* which differs from the 'closed society' in that 'it is potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity' (Turner, 1969 p112).

Certainly, if we consider the leaflet cited in Chapter Two, which says that

Queer means to fuck with gender. There are straight queers, bi queers, tranny queers, lez queers, fag queers, SM queers, fisting queers in every single street...  
(quoted in McIntosh, 1993 p31)

the only criterion of Queer is to 'fuck' with, or *play* with or *bend*, gender. The list includes the qualifying words 'straight', 'bi', 'tranny', 'lez', 'fag', 'SM' and 'fisting' but the implication is that it could easily be extended to include 'black', 'Asian', 'fascist',

‘Muslim’ or ‘disabled’. This definition does not describe a community, however unstructured that community might be, but an activity, the rejection of gender, by anyone from whatever section of the wider society that individual may be seen to belong. There is a difficulty, here, of the lack of social structure which corresponds to the notion of *communitas* bringing the notion of Queer closer in quality to *communitas* than to *community*. Turner also says that *communitas* ‘breaks in through the interstices of structure’, that it is locatable at the ‘edges of structure, in marginality’ and that it ‘transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships’ and that includes ‘essentially phenomena of transition’ (Turner, *ibid.* p128). Certainly, I suggest that the essential nature of Queer seeks to queer the structured gender norms of the heterosexual hegemony. The exponents of Queer performance also seek to ‘transgress or dissolve’ the images related to gender that emanate from this hegemony as well as the norms that govern the traditional structures of Performance. As far as Michael Wilson’s criteria of Queer performance, which were cited earlier, go it

is not an academic or rigorous category. It is unfixed and an intuitive one....Queer performance is a strategic intervention that is no longer queer as soon as you know exactly what it is: it’s queer, isn’t it? (Wilson, *ibid.* p20)

In this sense, then, it is a phenomenon of transition, queering the very process of categorization and structure itself. However, as Turner goes on to point out,

the ‘movement’ becomes itself an institution among other institutions..... for the reason that it feels itself to be the unique bearer of universal-human truths. (Turner, *ibid.* p11)

Returning to my suggestion in Chapter Two that Queer is *multi-aspected*, I would suggest that in addition to those characteristics that belong to *communitas*, Queer also

applies to actual communities and organizations within Queer culture that, in themselves, are structured, hierarchical and categorizable and that these are the very aspects of Queer culture that are opposed, critiqued and rejected by Queer performers like Amy Lamé, The Divine Feud, The Divine David and Kate Bornstein as being new orthodoxies. Having suggested that Queer by virtue of its *multi-aspected* nature can be relatable to *community* as well as *communitas*, I now wish to consider these Queer performances in the light of ‘carnival’ and ‘carnival’ as *communitas*.

These performances become embodiments of the unstructured, inclusive nature of *communitas* and of carnival as *communitas* by their sense of immediacy and spontaneity that is afforded by the blurring of the structures that relate to the distinction between performer and audience. This is achieved by their public locations (the market-place), their use of the performance spaces and their strategies of audience participation (including ritualized enactments, affirmations and games).

#### *Of the marketplace*

In describing carnival folk culture Bakhtin mentions ‘comic shows of the marketplace’. The term ‘marketplace’ creates a difficulty in relating some performances to Bakhtin’s model. While the parades and the outdoor events such as *The St Valentine’s Day Promenade Performance*, the performances and events in the middle of Hampstead Heath, on the Rochdale Canal in Manchester and the streets of Covent Garden can be adequately read within this paradigm, the indoor spaces do present a problem. It is the nature of carnival to be peripatetic, to allow for the disruption of the distinction between audience and performing participants and to be located in ‘the marketplace’,

in outdoor places not intended solely for performance/entertainment. Indoor performances may be likened to music-hall, pantomime, burlesque forms of entertainment or even circuses, but the fact that they are contained within enclosed performance spaces which maintain a separation of audience and performer areas and may, therefore, be less a part of the 'everyday' world of 'the people', works against including them in Bakhtin's category of folk carnival culture. On the other hand, it could be said that while Bakhtin might have suggested a vital interrelatedness between the Grotesque, carnival folk culture, literature and the dramatic manifestations of medieval life, he did not explore theatrical models but focused his paradigm on evidence from literature (Rabelais' text). Bristol acknowledges that 'there are no doubt circumstantial reasons for Bakhtin's decision to focus on the novel' (Bristol *ibid.* p24). However, it is reasonable to contend that had Bakhtin extended the scope of the evidence to include the theatrical and dramatic this might have affected the parameters which he set for the environments with which his 'carnival folk culture' could be identifiable.

To interpret Bakhtin's 'marketplace' as pertaining only to the outdoor environment of streets, public commerce and markets is to limit this term unnecessarily. Its meaning may be interpreted more broadly to include all locations with functions relating to general, everyday trade and commercial life, outdoor or not. It is also true that the whole concept of 'the marketplace' has changed so much in the age of multinational markets and the Internet that it is difficult to attempt any comparison between the various nuances of the term 'the marketplace' in the present day and those contained in any model that derives evidence from a Renaissance frame. Any study attempting

to look at possible relationships between performance forms and images from these two eras would have to acknowledge this difficulty.

While theatres are, indeed, institutions set aside specifically for performances, cafeterias and pubs are not. They exist to provide a variety of services and products: the selling and consumption of food and drink, a social *rendez-vous* for casual meetings or more organized groups, contact points for business negotiations and contracting. They are also part of a network of public locations where social control and law enforcement agencies (such as the police) can monitor the climate of the crime-related underworld that forms a significant part of contemporary socio-economic life. The fact that performances take place within these venues does not, therefore, make them exclusively 'performance' venues. If it is argued that to extend Bakhtin's category in this way is to distort it, then I could point out that the various strategies employed within these performances and venues break down, firstly, the distinction between their functions as performance spaces and as places for trade and commerce and, secondly, the distinction between performance areas and audience areas.

#### *Use of the performance space*

Some of the venues attempt to minimize the distinction between 'audience' and 'performers' areas while still retaining some structures in the environment that maintain the distinction. Of Queer club venues, the 'Duke's' bar (p71) is a significant example. There is a 'stage' area but it is small and somewhat rudimentary, with no wing space, no curtain and a series of small steps leading up to it from the dance floor which is immediately in front of it. It is also placed at the entrance end of the bar next to the

front door that opens on to the street, so that people are constantly coming in, paying their entrance money, and talking right next to the performer. This allows for interaction with people who have newly arrived and who may or may not wish to see the performance but who have to cross in front of the performance space to get to the bar. The potential here for welcome or unwelcome interactive participation is enormous. There are no stage lights or footlights. One or two lights are directed onto the stage from the general lighting rig, while lighting also spills over from the dance floor area on to the stage. The people at this venue are constantly moving, sometimes to play snooker, to visit the toilets, to play on the games machines, to go into the beer garden, to buy drinks etc. While there are some tables and chairs on raised areas for customers to sit at, these are intended for people who wish to socialize and meet and drink in comfort rather than as specific audience areas. They are separated from the main area by wooden railings and are placed so far back from the performance area that it is not feasible to watch the performance from them. One either needs to get up and stand in the general *melée* on and around the dance floor or stand up on the chairs against the wall at the back in order to view the performance. The performers' changing rooms are located at the furthest end of the bar from the performance area next to the coat check kiosk and the games area with the snooker table, cigarette machines, toilets and exit out to the beer garden at the rear of the building. It is a long and unavoidable promenade for the performers to reach the stage from the changing rooms. It does, however, allow for interactions with the audience before the performance starts on the stage. There is an enormous capacity for 'performance' and 'general club activity' to blur in the course of the evening simply by virtue of the structures by which this venue queers the separation not only between 'performer' and

'audience' but also between 'audience' and 'general customers'. From moment to moment they are moving in and out, between watching the show and going out into the garden, ordering drink or tobacco, or simply talking extremely loudly, negotiating business deals or whatever they may have come out to do. This ambiguity, ambivalence and constant perambulation gives audiences at such venues the quality of audiences at sea-side Punch-and-Judy shows or street entertainments, even though the performance is taking place indoors.

The same ambiguity and ambivalence in the ambulatory audience is occasioned by the environment at The Two Brewers pub which consists of two bars, one with a disco and the other called the 'cabaret bar'. There is a continuous movement of people between the two bars. The disco music from the dance bar is loud and is heard in the cabaret bar whether or not a performance is in progress. The audience is therefore always shifting, depending on whether people wish to watch the show or move away to dance or talk in the adjoining corridors. Some of the audience are seated at tables placed along the walls but many stand in front of the performance area which is a small stage mounted in the corner of the bar.

The performers need to be spontaneous and flexible when working in such circumstances and incorporate this environment into their shows, as does Dave Lynn when he comes down from the stage and walks about amongst the audience making light-hearted derogatory comments about the venue's lights ('reminds me of the black-out'), the curtains ('like something Malitza threw out of her wardrobe last summer'), the drink and hospitality ('who does a girl have to suck to get a drink around here').

Then again, when a male member of the audience crosses in front of the stage during the song *Mama*, Dave eyes him up and down, leering at the audience and licking his lips (p58).

At Duckie, Amy Lamé's club based at The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, the performance areas and audience areas are clearly distinguished as this venue has what can be properly called a small elevated stage. It does not have extensive wing space but it does have a curtain that is raised and lowered at the commencement and end of each performance. There are no steps leading from the stage to the audience level, which makes it difficult for the performers to mingle amongst the audience (called 'punters' in this Club's vernacular) who are unambiguously there to watch the show as well as to dance after the performances are over. The 'punters' are usually standing in the general space in front of and around the stage that has a slight thrust to it. There are few tables and chairs in this venue and those that are there are limited to the back wall furthest from the stage along a slightly elevated gallery. There is a very small dressing-room immediately off the stage which has a door with a set of steps leading down to the audience level. This is usually the means whereby performers and 'punters' can enter and leave each other's areas, apart from simply jumping down off the stage straight into the front section of the audience. If there is a minimum level of movement between performers and audience during the actual performance, there is a great deal of it prior to the curtain 'going up'. The dressing room door is fully visible from every point in the auditorium and, prior to the start of the shows, performers and 'punters' are constantly seen entering and exiting from this door. Performers also tend to remain in the bar drinking and chatting while Amy Lamé in her role as Hostess for the night

mingles with the ‘punters’ up until the time comes for her to begin the ‘Welcome to Duckie’ introductory ritual mentioned earlier.

The structured nature of this venue sets limits on the Duckie Club’s capacity to queer the distinction between performer and audience in a physical sense. However, other strategies are employed to accomplish the same objective: the ‘costume party’ dimension mentioned earlier, the audience participation game and quiz show format and the ‘interactive’ use of the toilet areas. The gender ascriptions of the toilets are not observed and toilet areas themselves become expressive, interactive spaces (p90). In connection with the general use of space at Duckie and use of the toilet areas in particular, Lamé says,

AL:.....we wanted one of those venues where public spaces and private spaces could be mixed up together - where the toilet is not only somewhere you go for essentially private and personal reasons but also somewhere where you can still participate in the happening while you’re being private. (p114)

This inversion of the traditional use of space is, for Lamé, integral to the gender transgressive Queer agenda of her performance work and also to the ethos of the ‘Duckie’ Club as a venue for Queer Art, and extends to the rejection of the normal gender-ascriptions given to toilets in other venues. She says,

AL: In one way I was trying to break down people’s thinking regarding toilets for different genders and also people’s ideas of gender, and why, when everyone is trying to do something that everyone needs to do, why segregate yourselves in order to have a pee? (p114)

In summing up this section, I would point out that the venues described are not solely for the presentation of performances. They function as providers of other services and products and customers may or may not be, at any particular time, part of the audience.

The structure of the spaces (including the toilets in one case) facilitates this ambiguity and mitigates against clear demarcation of areas between performer and audience. In those cases where the spaces have greater structural definitions, the performers deliberately set out to create alternative uses for the spaces and employ a variety of strategies to blur the distinction between audience and performer. All these characteristics contribute towards a performer-audience dynamic resembling that of the end-of-the-pier shows and perambulatory street performances sufficiently closely that it is possible to consider these performances within the paradigm of 'carnival folk culture' occurring in a kind of 'marketplace'.

*Audience participation, ritualized enactments, affirmations and games*

There are aspects of the performances that can be said to be ritualistic, in that they are repeated in each performance and involve the performers and the audience in affirmations, orchestrated gestures, calls, responses and games. These strategies contribute to the inclusive agenda of Queer as well as the qualities that Turner has described in relation to both the 'beat generation' and the formulations of Zen as examples of *communitas*: the stress on personal relationships rather than social obligations, polymorphic sexuality (the 'beat generation') and the 'all is one, one is all' position of Zen, which Turner also applies to the Hippie *communitas*.

When Amy Lamé in *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* involves the entire audience in the section of self-affirmation this is done in a ritualistic manner. She delivers her own self-affirmation (p103) where each adjective is accompanied by a gesture - with 'big' she spreads her arms in the air, with 'beautiful' and 'glamorous' she circles them

in front of her body sweeping them in an undulating motion around her breasts and hips and, finally with 'the best thing since sliced bread' she brings them down on to her hips in a gesture of positive assertion and confident sexuality. She then invites the audience to do the same and takes them through it word for word with the accompanying gestures as she has done. Even the invitation to the audience members to give themselves 'a pat on the back' is orchestrated with each member of the audience performing the gesture along with her. The piece ends with a final speech (p103) that is spoken in modulated, undulating tones rather like a blessing or a final commendation. The effect is that of an entertainment at a holiday camp or a light self-empowerment exercise within a therapy session. *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* was Lamé's debut performance on the Queer performance stage and it set some of the strategies for all her subsequent work, much of which retains this ritualistic style of presentation. The inclusion of her mother's maxims introduces a relationship with the audience that has the 'feel' of a caring and affectionate embrace on which to found the audience's involvement and this embracing relationship is then reinforced by the image of the 'big, fat bubble of love'. By using this image, Lamé herself becomes associated with it as the dispenser of the 'big, fat bubble of love', as the embodiment of the desirability of her own positive self-affirmation as a fat woman, whose body shape is traditionally rejected by the contemporary aesthetic of thinness, and also as an embodiment of the collective reinforcement of Queerness.

In her subsequent performances in *Cum Manifesto* and at her weekly Duckie Club this nurturing parental voice was still present, with the audience being referred to as boys and girls. This reinforced the 'holiday camp entertainment' dimension of her

performances and the Duckie Club' itself, which was billed as 'a place for boyzie girlz and girlzie boyz', emphasizing at the same time the 'youth culture' aspect as well as the gender transgressive Queer aspect of the club and the performances that one would expect to see in it. In her role as Hostess of Duckie Club (Plate 4) Lamé employs an opening ritual each week where she welcomes the audience and asks them to greet each other by saying "Hello Duckie!" in an orchestrated manner (p113). This short opening ritual is performed with the entire audience loudly declaiming the words of greeting. This weekly ritual is designed to set up the participatory nature of the performances at Duckie Club, where every night is focused around a theme which is publicized in advance and which the audience are invited to incorporate in their dress. This dressing up element at Duckie Club fosters an atmosphere that is a mix of costume party and indoor carnival, even though not everyone may come in thematic style. It is to cultivate this atmosphere, Lamé says, that the opening ritual is established.

Lamé does the same kind of ritualistic presentation in the sequence entitled 'Cuntlickers and Buttfuckers of the World Unite' in *Cum Manifesto*. The speech opens with a return to a reference to her mother's maxims:

You know, when I was a little girl, my mom always told me, 'Sticks and stones may break your bones but names will never hurt you'. (p108)

It almost immediately continues by involving the audience in a collective ritualistic enactment that starts with a series of responses to questions and that is reminiscent of religious revival meetings or political rallies:

How many of you were called poofter on the playground? I want to hear you say YEAH? If you're a pillowmuncher I want to hear you say YEAH! If you're a pussybumper I want to hear you say YEAH! The time has come for cuntlickers and buttfuckers of the world to unite! (p108)

The piece then continues with a series of orchestrated self-affirmative statements with accompanying gestures that the audience repeats after the performer (p108). Male and female genital parts are affirmed together by the audience without any distinction being made between genders as if everyone, male and female, is positively affirming all gender parts. The sequence ends with Lamé singing Whitney Houston's *The Greatest Love of All* - a ballad that is delivered as if it is an anthem.

A similar but somewhat less structured ritualistic introduction is found in the performances of Dave Lynn and Malitza. After singing the song *Willkommen* from the musical *Cabaret*, he breaks out of the song with 'What's a nice Jewish queen doing with this German shit!' and proceeds to welcome the audience and 'warm them up' with a series of questions picking out various sections of the audience, and as individual members respond he counters each reply with quick repartee (p57). The questions are targeted at the same sections of the audience at each performance: heterosexuals, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, Jews. It is a performance strategy that is utilized by numerous pub entertainers and is not exclusive to gender transgressive Queer performers nor to Dave Lynn and Malitza. It could be argued that this is simply banter similar to that presented by a stand-up comedian and does not constitute a ritual in the strict sense of the term. However, I suggest it is ritualistic to the extent that it is performed at the commencement of every performance, the sections of the audience targeted seldom vary and the audience which is frequently composed of regular customers of the pub expect the questions and respond immediately. Members of the audience attending for the first time are positively encouraged to participate. It is utilized as a strategy to leave a Queer

stamp on the performance and, also, to enable the performer to assess the climate and composition of the audience.

Other performance strategies utilized by Queer performers that blur the distinction between the audience and the performers and contribute to the carnivalesque entertainment are games and quizzes. Within the Revue style format of their show *The Divine Feud*, Chris Green and Cathy Peace present a skit in the style of the end-of-the-pier ventriloquist's act where Green plays a gay ventriloquist and Peace his puppet, Dumpy Dyke. Here, the audience is warmed up through a series of calls and games into representing an audience of gay and lesbian children. Dumpy Dyke (Cathy Peace) is a caricature of the dungaree-clad, dowdy lesbian feminist who is allowed the stage by the gay male ventriloquist played by Chris Green. Through the dialogue between the puppet and the manipulator we learn that Dumpy Dyke is going to be set aside and not appear in public again. The ventriloquist will in future be using a new puppet, Tutu the Tranny, to reflect 'new trends in entertainment'. Dumpy Dyke offers to play the part of Tutu the Tranny and the matter is thrown open to the 'children in the audience' who may give whatever response they will. This piece is celebratory of Queer sexuality while at the same time offering a critical commentary on the male-female power relations within the Queer communities at that time. Here the blurring of audience and performer is not so complete, as the control of the performance still remains with the two performers. The audience's decision-making resembles a comical employment of the kind of strategy that used to be utilized by Theatre-in-Education projects. However, as the audience are play-acting at being children, they cease at that point to be simply an audience who are being asked for an intervention.

They become other performers with a collective role - the children - and with a dialogue in which they have been coached earlier via the calls and responses they were asked to learn as the children.

Not all of the performers utilize the strategies I have mentioned above. However, in the performances where they play a substantial part they usually include some degree of ritualistic enactment in which the demarcation between audience and performer is disrupted. These elements connect these Queer performers with a cultural tradition that includes burlesque, pantomime and music hall, which are all in the tradition of Bakhtin's 'carnival folk culture'

### **iii) Carnival as the inversion of normality, as topsy-turvy**

Weimann, writing on medieval folk-plays and social customs refers to the inversion of normality as 'topsy-turvydom in ceremony and performance' (Weimann, 1978 p20). He suggests that the origins of topsy-turvydom lie in the formulae of magical incantations in pursuance of a better life, Utopian ideals or magical control over catastrophes and a hostile universe and that these origins were eventually forgotten or 'misunderstood as comic or grotesque' (*ibid.* p20). Whatever view one may hold of this suggestion, it is tenable to make a connection between these possible origins and the contemporary use of such inversion, in the work of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, for example, who have a Utopian mission to 'promulgate Universal Joy and expiate Stigmatic Guilt'. Besides considering the performances of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in this light, I shall also look at examples of the topsy-turvy in the work of other performers, including the use of parody, travesty and of bad language and lavatorial humour, all

of which are, also, parts of Bakhtin's criteria of 'carnival folk culture'.

### *Parody and Travesty*

Before looking at the use of parody and travesty in these performances, I feel it is necessary to consider the nature of 'parody' as presented by Bakhtin and some commentaries on it. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. Emerson, 1984, p194), Bakhtin lists the various forms of parody. He says it can involve the parody of another person's style, 'another's socially typical or individually characterological manner of seeing, thinking and speaking'. It may vary from 'superficial verbal forms' to the 'deepest principles governing another's discourse'. It 'may be an end in itself (for example, literary parody as a genre), but it may also serve to further other positive goals'. He says that 'analogous to parodistic discourse is ironic or any other double-voiced use of someone's words', and that here, the parodist's intentions are to use the parodied material 'for conveying aspirations that are hostile' to it. Margaret Rose in her exhaustive study *Parody: Ancient, modern and post-modern* (1993, p130) comments that 'Bakhtin's classification of parody as "double-voiced" lends it some ambivalence' but that his stress on the hostility of the parodist indicates that he continued to ascribe to parody a largely destructive quality. However, parody for Bakhtin was also an expression of the debasement contained in the 'bringing down to earth' quality of the process of degradation that was vital to grotesque realism and the material bodily principle. In *Rabelais and His World* he is clearly concerned with the regenerative qualities of medieval parody which is linked with carnival laughter when he says,

Medieval parody is unique, quite unlike the purely formalist literary parody of modern times, which has a solely negative character and is deprived of regenerative ambivalence. (Bakhtin, *ibid.* p21)

Rose, however, points out that by describing parody as ‘double-voiced’ or ambiguous, Bakhtin is only describing ‘one of its aspects...which it shares with several other forms’ (Rose, *ibid.* p134). She goes on later in her study to cite Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* in which he equates parody with ridicule by illustrating the parodying of a sonnet:

In a parody of the sonnet, we must first of all recognize a sonnet, its form, its specific style, its manner of seeing, its manner of selecting from and evaluating the world - the world view of the sonnet as it were. A parody may represent and ridicule these distinctive features of the sonnet well or badly, profoundly or superficially. (Bakhtin, quoted in Rose, *ibid.* p143)

While acknowledging Bakhtin’s circumstantial and political reasons for focusing on carnival folk humour, Rose’s argument is that one of the problems with Bakhtin’s analysis is his view of parody as ‘carnivalistic folk mockery or ridicule’ and its application to complex works of parody where it proves to be inadequate. She suggests that Bakhtin ‘exacerbated’ the problem by reducing the formalist concept of parody

to the burlesque and to its ridiculing uses in folk literature, and by sometimes describing parody as being on a par with travesty when discussing its carnivalistic forms, or, as in some of his other essays, as a ‘parodic-travesty form’. (Rose, *ibid.* p158)

Clearly, Bakhtin’s concept of parody is not without its difficulties. As a number of exponents of gender transgressive Queer performance have associated their work with the terms ‘camp’, and ‘burlesque’ (Peace, Green, Carr and Lamé), with ‘foolery’ and ‘clowning’ (Lynn, Mother Lubricious), with ‘pastiche’ (Mother Lubricious, Malitza), with ‘piss-take’ (Green, Titti La Camp), ‘carnavalesque’ and ‘bizarre, sexual archetypes’, with ‘ambiguity in images that makes questioning happen’ (Green, Peace and Carr), with ‘avant garde and anarchic nihilism’ (The Divine David), with

‘deconstructing celebrity’ (Green) and ‘deconstructing gay lifestyles’ (Green and Peace), it would indicate that ‘parody’ here is being associated, in part at least, with the same qualities that are contained in what Rose has called Bakhtin’s ‘carnival folk mockery and ridicule’. However, these associations also indicate that the thinking of some of these performers has been informed by meanings that have accrued to ‘parody’ and ‘travesty’ with the development of post-modernist thinking - such as Hassan’s concept of ‘carnivalization’ which is described in *The Postmodern Turn* (1987) as ‘“polyphony”, the centrifugal power of language, the “gay relativity of things”’ (which is Bakhtin’s term), ‘perspectivism and performance, participation in the wild disorder of life’ (Hassan *ibid.* p171). Hassan goes on to say, quoting from *Rabelais and His World*, that ‘what Bakhtin calls novel or carnival - that is, antisystem - might stand for postmodernism itself or at least for its ludic and subversive elements that promise renewal’ (Hassan, *ibid.*).

The ritual ceremony performances of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are performed by celebrant male nuns/sisters with ‘nunsona’ names such as Mother Ophelia Balls, Sister Virgin on the Ridiculous, Sister Madonna of the Edible Orifice, Sister Mystic Smeg of the Fortune-Telling Penis and Crystal Balls and, as we have already seen, Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look. The text of a Ceremony of Vestition (see Appx. B) conducted by the Manchester House (The Convent of the Swishing Curtain) opens with the Call:

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

see you!)

**Congregation:** To bona you varda!

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

**Congregation:** To bona you varda!

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

postulant:

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

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

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

Moving through The Wimple, The Guimpe and the Bandeau, The Clothing ends with the Veil and the Boots:

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

(*The Boots*)Keep your shoes shiny and clean.  
Use plenty of polish, don't be mean.

Let them reflect a nun who seems well built  
As you expiate Stigmatic Guilt.

(Text of Vestition Ceremony of the OPI, Manchester  
House)

The travesty of the ceremonies of the established church is clear, as are the sexual and lavatorial connotations of the uses made of various items of clothing - the tunic hiding the pimples on the bum (sores); the 'joy that you will bring to every girl and boy'; the scapula hiding the hands, showing the world 'your ecstasy'; the veil flowing like 'escaping gasses' (farts); and the exhortation to use 'plenty of polish' on the boots ( spit and polish, lubricant, grease and sado-masochistic fantasy). There is in these images a presentation of the ugly within a context of the beautiful. These are not Gothic images where the ugliness is sensationalized for its own sake. Here, the ugly and the disgusting are linked with the delightful, 'joy', 'ecstasy', and are, therefore, grotesque and comic at the same time.

In the Joining Ceremony of EH and FA, Mother Lubricious of the Lascivious Look was the Sister Celebrant and the invocation to the Gathered Faithful (general public and guests at the ceremony) was called, in a manner very much like a traditional Town Crier to the ringing of many bells:

Be it known to all the Gathered Faithful here present, Mother Molesta, Sisters, Acolytes, Friends for the day, Slaves, Catamites and all terrifically interested parties that the Order of Perpetual Indulgence is about to conduct its soon-to-be-famous JOINING CEREMONY!..... We are a world-wide sadomystic cult and self-catering organization, except when we're at the bar, which is when our vow of poverty is most useful!....

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are happy to assist these men to publicly declare their delight in charver (sex), the shocking shudder of coincidental spattering and the ultimate and long-anticipated Victory to Cum. We share their pride in their love and commitment, without fear, without shame or guilt or blame.

(Public Joining Ceremony of EH and FD, October 1995)

The language of the text is the bawdy language of burlesque and is grotesque. The call reads very like Rabelais' prologue to *Gargantua*:

Most noble boozers, and you my esteemed and poxy friends.... now what do you think is the purpose of this preamble, of this preliminary flourish? It is that you, my good disciples and other leisured fools, in reading the pleasant titles of certain books of our invention such as *Gargantua*, *Pantagruel*, *Toss-pint*, *On the Dignity of Codpieces*, *Of Peas and Bacon*, *cum cum commento* etc. may not too easily conclude that they treat of nothing but mockery.. (Rabelais, trans. Cohen, 1955 p37)

In these ceremonial performances, the established church's concepts of goodness and naturalness - heterosexuality and sexual continence - are inverted and replaced by Queer sex and sexual freedom, the established church's virtue of remorse for sins, penitence and pleas for indulgence (forgiveness) are seen as a result of the sense of guilt which is to be expiated. The Catholic Church's anathema becomes the agent of joy, light and salvation. The ceremony itself is referred to as a 'voodoo', something that traditionally is associated by the Christian Church with 'black' magic and devilry. Yet the form of the Congregation's responses adopted at times, 'Hail, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence', together with the use of censers, incense and bells, clearly parody the versicles, responses and ceremonial accoutrements of a Christian service. The up-ending of the 'mission' of the Christian Church and its replacement by another 'mission' worded with the same salvationist language, 'to expiate Stigmatic Guilt', to 'promulgate Universal Joy', is a deliberate form of parody, as is the opening speech of the Joining Ceremony, calling down 'the Almighty Queer Power which was created by us and for us, for our own liberation' (p82) The parodic element also has the voice of self-mockery which is seen throughout the Joining Ceremony (see above).

However, there is also evidence of travesty here in the words 'By the power vested in

me by my birthright as an out and proud gay man of one of the seven genders' (p82 ) and 'the joining of two fantabulosa and fragrant omipalones' (p82) where there is irreverent play with gender, with inverted authority and with language. The nuns' habits, the assumed titles of Mother and Sister by 'male nuns' who diligently reject the pronoun 'she' and who are referred to as 'he' and 'him' in the directions of the Vestition Ceremony script, the use of 'Mother Inferior' in place of the traditional 'Mother Superior' for those nuns in higher status positions in the Houses, are all examples of travesty as well as parodic inversion of the norms of the Church.

The Ceremony of Vestition follows carefully and recreates, garment by garment, the real Vestition ceremony of a novice in the Catholic Church but uses sexual allusions in the text. This is travesty where there is no ambiguity. It replaces one 'salvationist' mission with another one and celebrates a 'universal freedom' and there is the feeling of regeneration implied by the lifting of a 'sense of guilt'. Certainly, the language in which the organization's structure is spoken of is parody - the local groups are called 'Houses', they 'manifest in habit three times a year' which is referred to as 'Cracking the Habit' (p87), they meet in 'conclave' twice a year to agree 'canonizations of saints' (p86) and, according to Mother Lubricious, the form of the Vestition Ceremony is a straight 'lift' from the established church and the main thrust of the work is 'attacking the established order' (p86).

The two lesbian and male couples in wedding outfits at the Gay Pride Parade (Plates 27 and 28) are images of travesty, in that cross-dressing is an embodiment of a transgressive refusal of existing gender roles. The female 'groom' is cross-dressed in

conservative black tie whereas the male 'bride' is in an elaborate gown with a spectacular bonnet. However, they are parodic in the sense that what is being embodied is a gender transgressive edition of heterosexual coupledness within the matrimonial frame of 'bride and groom'. The 'Bishop' (Plate 29) complete with mitre, crook and holding a beer can in his hand making a gesture of 'blessing' is presenting a parodic image of the established Church of England, that has in recent years dealt with the issues of homosexuality and the 'outing' of several clerics with great discomfort. The two drag Kings, women in frilly-fronted white shirt and black suits (Plate 30) and the drag Queen with a pink wig (Plate 31) are fairly straightforward examples of drag travesty but with the heightened carnivalesque style; as is the fat drag Queen with a red cape and polystyrene black wig that sits heavily on her head (Plate 32). The two angels, however, are both parodic as well as images of travesty. The white angel in a feather boa (Plate 33) holding up a wand which has a plastic doll attached to it is a male in angel drag but as far as his genitals are clearly visible he presents a kind of inversion in which the angel's ethereality is replaced by an earthy sexual image. The bizarre figure on stilts, the 'Angel of the North' (Plate 34), presents a gender ambiguous image with enormous wings, a 'send-up' of the sculpture of the same name that was erected near Manchester.

Returning now to the cabaret performances, I consider it debatable as to whether or not Titti La Camp's Drunken Nun performance can be truly called parody. It is a 'send-up' of the Church's policy of abstemiousness, but by using the song 'One day at a time, Sweet Jesus' it becomes a 'send-up' of the Alcoholic Anonymous's treatment method. However, as Titti La Camp is actually a male performer, I would consider this to be

travesty, in the sense that I have been defining it here and in the earlier chapter on drag. In fact most of Titti La Camp's and Lizzie Drip's work would be difficult to categorize as 'parody' but would be examples of travesty.

It may be argued that the travesty in the performances of Titti La Camp and those of Lizzie Drip is based on mockery eliciting disgust and displeasure whereas carnival has a positive and assertive character, being universal and representing all the people, fertility, abundance, growth and renewal, at least as far as Bakhtin's 'carnival laughter' is concerned. In response I suggest that such a criticism would hold if a perfect correlation is sought between Bakhtin's 'carnival laughter' and gender transgressive Queer performance. To attempt such a correlation would be to disregard that Bakhtin based his typology on his readings of Rabelais and medieval carnival in which the festive elements of folk culture were seen as predominant. To claim such a correlation would also be to disregard the distance between Bakhtin's model of the body politic as being rooted in 'the people' - a model that fails, as Russo says (*ibid.* p63), to acknowledge the social relations of gender - and the model of the body politic presented by several Queer theorists and political writers. In the latter, which has informed gender transgressive Queer performance, the categorical gender class system is viewed as one of a vast and comprehensive pattern of class-based practices that needs to be disrupted. To argue that no correlation can be made at all between the destructive, negative images in these performances and Bakhtin's 'carnival laughter' would be to disregard Bakhtin's own notion that the process of degradation, while leading towards a renewal of life, has a destructive component (Bakhtin, *ibid.* p21). It may also be argued that the images presented here have more affinity with Kayser's reading of the Grotesque as something

hostile, alien and shocking in that they embody ‘estrangement’ and are received by spectators/audience as ‘disgusting’, ‘absurd’, ‘distorted’ and ‘monstrous’. This argument disregards the fact that the agenda of gender transgressive Queer performance includes the disruption of the categorical gender system and the ‘dominant bourgeois ideology’ with its prescriptions for cultural life, taste and aesthetics. This agenda involves the use of aesthetic values that might well be regarded as ‘disgusting’ and ‘offensive’ but which are, at the same time, comically grotesque. Richard Byrne (who performs as Titti La Camp) describes the work as ‘sick’ while expressing no intention to present ‘sick’ material.

TLC: I probably use the word ‘sick’ to describe my show because that’s the word everyone throws at me. It’s sort of been thrust on me. When I sat down and thought about what I was going to do I didn’t intend it first of all to be sick. I just did what I thought I would find funny.....I always see all comedy happening at the expense of someone or something or other. And with that I just take it to an extreme. And I think people laugh at what scares them probably - cancer, bulimia, death. Or if they become detached from it they can laugh at it. But I can’t say I can tell you for sure. (p53)

Jean Baudrillard used the term ‘parody’ to describe destructiveness as well as non-intentionality. In his essay *The Order of Simulacra* (1975), he wrote that ‘a kind of non-intentional parody hovers over everything’ (*ibid.* p150) and that ‘art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality... and so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone’ (*ibid.* p151). John Lechte (1994) says that:

an outcome of Baudrillard’s analysis of consumption in terms of signs is that it undermines the validity of the distinction.... between true and false, artificial and real needs (Lechte, *ibid.* p234)

and that Baudrillard sets out the idea that

in the discourse of consumption, there is an anti-discourse.... even to the point

where advertizing often intentionally parodies advertizing..... the society of consumption is also the society of the denunciation of consumption (*ibid.* p235).

There is a question as to whether or not the performers here can be viewed as part of the Queer culture's confusion between its reality and its aesthetic image or as the denunciation of the consumerism of the media, where gender transgressive personalities and performers like Rupaul are used to promote jeans and Lily Savage can host the game show Blankety-Blank. Certainly, Chris Green touches on this point when he says,

Queer becomes fashion based, more 'life-style' based, it becomes 'cool' places to go, it doesn't become 'everybody can do what they want and we're all bound by being transgressive', which is my understanding of the word...The consumerization of Queerness has become what a lot of it is about now. (p92)

*Language of the marketplace, oaths, curses, lavatorial humour*

It would be reasonable to expect Queer performers' verbal material to include a substantial degree of lavatorial humour and 'street' vernacular when most of their material is subversive and to do with genital organs and transgressive sexuality. There is plenty of evidence of this in the ceremonies of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and the performances of Dave Lynn and Malitza and Amy Lamé. The texts of the two ceremonies of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence contain a substantial amount of the 'roustabout' language of the 'street' as well as word-pictures based on evacuatory processes. In the Vestition Ceremony the nun's tunic is said to 'be your strength for years to come and hide the pimples on your bum' (p362); the Scapula is to be 'straight, not fanned' and the novice is exhorted to 'let it hide your hands! Keep it ironed and flowing free' and to 'let it show the world your ecstasy' (p362) and to let the Veil 'flow through the world like escaping gasses as you grant Perpetual Indulgence to the masses'

(p363). While these may be somewhat veiled references with double meanings the lavatorial and evacuatory implications are clear, as they are also in the Joining Ceremony where the two grooms are to 'publicly declare their delight in charver (trans: *sex*) the shocking shudder of coincidental spattering, and the ultimate and long-anticipated Victory to Cum'(p82) .

The performances of Dave Lynn and Malitza are spattered with bawdy and offensive words: 'Who do you have to suck to get a drink around here?'; 'I've got a mouth like a cottage in Barking!' When, in the middle of one of his songs, Dave Lynn suggestively eyes up a male member of the audience who crosses in front of the stage and makes his way to the toilet exit, he follows him half-way along the floor, turns back and interrupts the song with, 'Thinks she'll be lucky! Wonder where her boyfriend is tonight?'(p58). When a member of the audience shouts something, Lynn steps forward into the audience and says, 'What's that? Oh, you ARE the boyfriend! Well, what the fuck are you doing here? I've seen you on the Common!' Relating his encounter with the hamburger salesman outside the pub he says:

You know, as we were coming here this evening we saw that man outside the pub selling hamburgers and hotdogs and I thought, 'You poor fucker! Standing here on a freezing night trying to get these silly bloody queens to swallow your sausages... Oh, I know you lot! Saving the swallowing for the Common later on! (p60)

A member of the audience shouts something to Dave. He responds with:

I wouldn't try to speak with my mouth full if I was you... Oh, me?... I have my own hamburger which I'm keeping warm. (p61)

Amy Lamé's show *Cum Manifesto* is full of sexual humour. Here the main issues of the

piece are sexual and much of the sexual language is not abusive, but ‘street talk’. She opens the show dedicating it to all you ‘fuckers, suckers and wankers out there’; she talks about her dream in which she describes ‘fucking guys up the arse’. She talks about condoms and says,

OH MY GOD you just got a hard on when I SAID the word condom! Look at that bulge! (and I don’t mean your belly, luv!) Well, darling, you’re one lucky man ’cause lots of guys go limp at the sight of a rubber. Now, I know some of you guys like big wangers (p106)

and

What the FUCK does a lesbian know about Safer Sex? How can some big, loud-mouthed American dyke tell me what to do with my willy? (p108)

This language may be appropriate to the actions and activities described but nevertheless it is worded in very basic, crude ‘in your face’ terms normally associated with builders and ‘navvies’, particularly the speech she quotes from a gay male friend of hers:

When you go down on your knees, do you ever wonder how you got there in the first place? I mean, there’s so many things you gay boys can get up to, why the big deal with sucking? I asked one of my gay boy mates to explain this sucking phenomena to me, and he said there’s nothing like a red hot poker down your gob.  
(p353)

It is this kind of hyperbolization via the crude language of the street imaging the act of oral sex as a ‘red hot poker down your gob’ that makes it grotesque but, at the same time, makes it a comic celebration of one aspect of Queer sexuality expressed with a sense of playfulness. It is this sense of comic celebration that brings these Queer performers’ work close to the nature of carnival.

## **Summary**

I have attempted to show that a number of characteristics of carnival are also present

in the work of gender transgressive Queer performance. After surveying some commentaries on and critiques of Bakhtin's model of carnival, including Bristol, Fiske, and Kershaw, I have conclude that the idea of a 'Queer carnival' can best be articulated from within a 'contextualized' frame, such as suggested by Kershaw, where it can then be seen as deriving its significance from the oppositional position that Queer political ideology takes in relation to the dominant hegemonies. Once this is established Queer carnival can be understood as the manifestation of both the celebration of Queer culture by/for itself and in the wider society, as well as a positive form of oppositional action taken against the perceived injustices and oppressive institutions of that wider society. This dual-natured quality of the Queer carnival can be related to the dual nature of carnival in general - celebratory and oppositional - and can also be evidenced in the gender transgressive images within Queer performance.

The pageantry and spectacular nature of carnival as public occasion can be demonstrated by the Pride parades, street parties and numerous images and strategies employed by the performers, by the peripatetic as well as the processional qualities of the parades and marches and by the peripatetic nature of the performances in the parks and in open-air locations where the distinction between audience and performers is intentionally unclear.

Having considered how useful it might be to view Queer as *communitas* rather than as *community*, I have concluded that, due to the *multi-aspected* nature of Queer there are aspects to the term that can be regarded as *communitas* and as *community*, depending on which aspect of Queer is being considered. However, I suggested that there are

elements within these Queer performers' work that partake of the spontaneous, immediate, unstructured, inclusive and transitional nature of *communitas*. These elements are the immediacy and spontaneity afforded by the unstructured and, sometimes, public nature of the performance spaces; the use that the performers make of these spaces in order to blur the boundary between performer/audience and public/private activity; and the inclusive quality of the performances that is achieved by the performers' use of strategies such as audience participation in ritualized enactments, affirmations and games. All these elements involves an audience that is ambulatory and ambiguous and that this, to varying degrees, queers the distinction between audience and performer and brings these performances close to the nature of *communitas* and to carnival.

Going on to consider the work of these Queer performers in terms of carnival as the inversion of normality, topsy-turvydom, parody and travesty, I suggested that there is some difficulty that arises from differences in the interpretation of the meaning of the term 'parody'. Having looked at Bakhtin's description of 'parody' as being 'double-voiced' and his association of the term with 'burlesque', 'ridicule' and 'regenerative laughter', and outlined some commentaries and critiques of Bakhtin's analysis, I related these associations to the Queer performances in terms of the text, images and the audience-performer dynamics. Returning to consider the elements of parody and travesty more fully, I concentrated on the 'celebratory' nature of parody and travesty in these performances. Where I have touched on the 'destructive' aspect of travesty, I have read it as part of the degradation process that leads to 'renewal' which also forms the substantial content of Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' and 'carnival laughter'.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The project of which this thesis is the culmination had its origins in my clinical dramatherapy work with clients for whom gender identity was a vital issue. My work with these clients was centred around their ambivalence towards male and female gender behaviours as well as towards any sense of establishing stabilized gender identities for themselves via gender re-assignment surgery. Sessions with these young, anatomically male clients involved enactments in which they identified with stereotypical notions of 'feminine' role models, idealized characters and fantasy characters of the female gender derived from the media, while *at the same time* identifying with selected aspects of the 'masculine'. The project was given further impetus by the BBC's Q.E.D. programme *Sex Acts*, which documented cases in which other individuals were expressing gender transgressive behaviour similar to that which I observed with my dramatherapy clients.

As my clients and the people featured in *Sex Acts* wished to live neither as male nor as female but with gender ambiguous identities and identified with a kind of *gender fluidity* which they expressed by playing, as it were, with the stereotypic indicators of both genders, I became interested in exploring the question of what kinds of public performance might relate to these individuals' situations. This involved me in a search for performers whose performances utilized images that embodied the gender transgressive positions of my clients, while at the same time, relating to the life situations of the individual performers involved. This led to a study of what I have chosen to call Queer Performance.

There are many performers besides those included in this study who may be identified or identify themselves as Queer. I based my selection of performers for this project on my search for images in performance that I perceived to be gender transgressive and that embodied the positions adopted by my dramatherapy clients in clinical practice. While the performers whose work I selected are significant in the field, I found there to be great diversity even within the range I selected: from structured, scripted theatrical productions to cabaret performances founded on traditional drag entertainment, from socio-politically oriented performances to performance art pieces arising expressly out of the existential circumstances of the performers themselves, from ritual ceremonial performances to spontaneous street theatre and carnival performances, from performances that centre around the performers' *real life* transgender situations to performances that involve *playing* with gender in the service of an agenda that is ideologically oppositional to the heterosexual hegemony. This diversity arises, partly, from the development of the term 'queer' to a position of non-alignment with any *specific* identity category - it can be annexed to any number of agendas and discourses - and, partly, from the fact that Queer performance is constantly being redefined as performers find newer forms and media.

With the above concerns in mind I formulated the seven questions that informed the structure of the thesis:

*What is the nature of the gender transgressive position taken by the individuals who reject the male-female gender binary and how do these performers embody this position in their performances?*

I suggested that these individuals choose to identify with a greater degree of flexibility

than is available within the binary of the male-female gender system. They chose to express what Samuels has called the 'multifarious potentials' (*ibid.* p 217) of gender which are already present but not validated within the binary system of gender, which is in place to serve the interests of what Butler has called 'the institution of compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler, *ibid.* p23). This gender transgressiveness includes *gender ambiguity*, which is the refusal to conform to gender behaviour and images that are prescribed by the male-female gender code, and *gender fluidity*, which is the refusal to remain identifiable with one or other gender by shifting freely between genders.

Some of these performers embody these gender transgressive positions by *playing* with the indicators of both male and female genders *at the same time*, by transgendered casting, together with a juxtaposition of styles and gender stereotypes to embody the crisis of category; by the presentation of one character split between several performers of varying genders, or by presenting two or more characters and sexualities in the same performer. These techniques embody a critique of the notion of *a single unified Self* which is at the heart of the identification of one individual with one gender that is embedded within the male-female gender code.

*To what extent can the gender fluid and gender ambiguous transgressive positions embodied in the work of these performers be better understood by applying the criteria of the liminal and/or liminoid?*

In the sense that 'gender ambiguity' and 'gender fluidity' are positions that embody resistance to simple categorization in terms of the male-female binary and in doing so present a shape-shifting agenda these performers invite scrutiny within the context of

liminality. However, the assumption that individuals who identify with gender transgressive positions or performers and artists who embody these images in their work are on a transitional threshold from maleness to femaleness or vice versa is, I believe, mistaken. They represent at different times states of fluidity between genders and non-compliance with the male-female gender binary. However, stereotypic aspects of gender role, behaviour and images need to be utilized by them at various times in order to manifest this fluidity and non-compliance. To the extent that the transgression implies an individual's *intention* to freely *choose* to play with gender and go beyond the boundary, I have argued that these individuals and performers are working against assumptions within liminal situations and so come closer to the *liminoid* than the liminal

While there have been many discussions of liminality in relation to gender and performance this is not my specific subject. I chose to use Victor Turner's model (along with the perceptions of writers such as Bornstein and Wilson) as a useful set of criteria in approaching this material though I have also presented some arguments as to the extent to which Turner's model is not altogether satisfactory and some alternative ways in which the question of the binary can be approached.

*What is the nature of 'queer', what is its place in Queer Theory and what are the characteristics of Queer performance?*

Having explored the development of the term 'queer' through its history and through the frame of Queer Theory, I have reached a number of conclusions. Firstly, that the term 'queer' cannot be applied to any 'fixed' category in any specific discourse. It cannot be 'owned' simply as an integral term in the deconstruction of gender or identity nor can it be 'owned' simply as a short-hand term for the quadruple-headed phrase 'gay-

lesbian-bisexual-transgender' communities. It is queer and not easily frameable. Secondly, I have argued that it can be applied *both* to those identities and behaviours that are transgressive of the dominant heterosexual hegemony *as well as* to those individuals and organizations who are involved in destabilizing the frames of fixed social and gender identity. The term 'queer' can be applied to *sexual transgression*, by which I mean gay, lesbian and bisexual activity, and *gender transgression*, which can include gender ambiguity, gender fluidity and free, liminoid gender play. It is, by its nature, resistant to categorization and consolidation.

With these considerations in mind, I have presented a set of criteria for Queer performance based on the extent to which performances are 'oppositional' to orthodoxies and hegemonic structures; challenge the male-female gender binary through gender fluidity, playing with gender codes; challenge the concept of fixed identity as embodied in a fully unified, integrated subject; present a challenge to the gay and lesbian cultural neo-orthodoxy; and stem from the life circumstances of the performers, writers and directors concerned who identify with some queer or borderline community or non-community.

*To what extent can the notions 'Queer' and 'Queer performance' help in understanding the gender transgressive performers I have observed?*

It has been my contention throughout that these performers embody in their work variations on the type of challenges presented by real individuals who wish to remain uncategorizable by gender. It is this 'performed embodiment' of the oppositional and disruptive positions with regard to gender and sexuality, I believe, that is at the heart of

gender transgressive Queer performance, whether or not the actual bodies of the performers are male-inscribed or female-inscribed and whether or not the performers intend to address specific issues relating to transgenderism. The celebration of Queer choice which they embody in their performances involves a questioning and challenging of heterosexual hegemony, whether or not that challenge is made explicit as such or is consciously acted on by individual performers.

The Divine David stands alone among these performers in that he incorporates 'camp' and 'bizarre' elements in his self presentation, but does not embody or articulate a transgendered position, nor present images taken from existing gay male culture. In his anarcho-nihilistic presentation he embodies a rejection of categorical gender, including the language in which gender is presented. He also embodies a rejection of the existing positions taken within mainstream gay male culture and of the wider consumer society in which they are found. Out of all the performers it is his work that most provocatively challenges what can be called mainstream Queer culture's consumerization and activism.

*What is the relationship between drag and Queer gender transgressive performance?*

I suggested that drag is implicated in the Queer position only as far as the Queer position is concerned with gender transgression. The performers that I have observed have challenged traditional notions within the discourse of drag by re-defining it as

- i) a performance form in its own right with roots in burlesque;
- ii) a performance strategy utilized to embody their gender transgressive positions in relation to the dominant categorical gender class system, where it is seen as travesty;

iii) a strategy utilized to embody transgressive positions in opposition to what is perceived as a new dominant orthodoxy within the gay/lesbian cultures.

*To what extent can the work of these Queer gender transgressive performers be seen to relate to the Grotesque?*

Having established my working definition of the term 'grotesque' as a combination of Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' and the contrast of opposites (the 'ugly' as 'beautiful', the 'painful' as 'comic', the 'monstrous' as 'delightful'), I suggested that in gender transgressive Queer performance, the performers can be seen as offering their bodies publicly in performance as embodiments of the performers' personal questioning, rejecting or queering of gender identity as a stable, body-bound state. I suggested that Bakhtin's analysis of 'the grotesque body' is of some value in understanding and framing the comically grotesque imagery in these performances which arises from the transgressive contrast of opposites. I also suggested that the images in these performances relate to Bakhtin's 'grotesque' body as far as they present the body as being 'multiple and changing'. I concluded that these performers are grotesque in appearance in that they present images of the body that are the antithesis of the 'classical body', with the reservation that the 'classical body' in contemporary gay male culture is the image of the sexually desirable object informed by the aesthetics of the pagan world of Greek antiquity rather than by the medieval aesthetic.

I concluded, as well, that these performances are embodiments of grotesque behaviour and bodily processes where they show a concern with organs and functions of the 'lower bodily stratum' and with the products of these bodily functions such as vomit,

excrement, and bodily fluids as well as with the processes of degradation (bringing down to earth) and renewal. These performances also bear a relationship to Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body' as they incorporate the processes of transformation and renewal, such as copulation, birth, death and rebirth.

*What relationship can Queer gender transgressive performance be said to have with carnival?*

As I have mentioned, the comically grotesque imagery in these performances arises from the transgressive contrast of opposites. This relates to the use of parody and travesty contained within the 'topsy-turvy' quality of the images in these performances, as well as to the kind of laughter and discomfort that they engender. I suggest that these performances can be associated with a cultural tradition extending from the Feast of Fools and carnival through burlesque to Queer performance.

I consider that the idea of a 'Queer carnival' can best be articulated from within a 'contextualized' frame, such as suggested by Kershaw, where it can then be seen as deriving its significance from the oppositional position of Queer political ideology in relation to the dominant hegemonies. 'Queer carnival' can then be understood as a celebration of Queer culture within the wider society and also as a positive form of oppositional action against the perceived injustices and oppressive institutions of that wider society. This duality can be related to the dual nature of carnival in general - celebratory and oppositional - and can also be seen in the gender transgressive images within Queer performance. The pageantry and spectacular nature of carnival as public occasion and events is demonstrated by the Pride parades, street parties and numerous

images and strategies employed by the performers, by the peripatetic as well as the processional qualities of the performances.

Due to the multi-aspected nature of 'queer', a term that can be applied to *communitas* as well as to *community*, depending on which aspect of 'queer' is being considered, I suggest that there are elements within these Queer performers' work that partake of the spontaneous, immediate, unstructured, inclusive and transitional nature of *communitas* demonstrated by the immediacy and spontaneity afforded by the unstructured and sometimes public nature of the performance spaces; the use that the performers make of these spaces in order to blur the boundary between performer/audience and public/private activity; and the inclusive quality of the performances achieved by the performers' use of strategies such as audience participation in ritualized enactments, affirmations and games. All these elements bring these performances close to the nature of carnival.

The work of these Queer performers is rich in terms of topsy-turvydom, parody and travesty as political opposition as well as comic celebration. Having looked at Bakhtin's description of 'parody' as being 'double-voiced' and his association of the term with 'burlesque', 'ridicule' and 'regenerative laughter', I believe I have demonstrated the presence of both parody and travesty in these Queer performances in the texts used, the images presented and the audience-performer dynamics involved. The parodic elements chiefly consist of the up-ending of images and structures of established institutions within what is perceived as being the oppressive heterosexual hegemony while the travesty is largely present in the gender transgressive drag itself.

This study already feels like a history. I am aware that some of these performers have already evolved and developed different performance forms and strategies and maintain different viewpoints on their work and the direction both of their own performances and of Queer performance in general. The performances of Titti La Camp, Lizzie Drip and Amy Lamé have undergone almost imperceptible changes; Michael Topping no longer performs as 'Malitza', choosing to perform as Topping (dressed in show-biz male clothing) with another male performer known as 'Butch', while the content of the 'patter' and the musical material remain in the field of verbal parody of the male-female gender system; The Divine Feud no longer perform together - Chris Green went on to develop performances as 'Tina C' in which the deconstruction of celebrity was, arguably, as integral an issue as the gender-transgressive drag; Marissa Carnesky (Carr) has gone on to develop performances such as *Jewess Tatoeess* in which she still plays with transgressive images of female sexuality but is also concerned with exploring her own Jewish roots and challenging the taboos within the Jewish culture; in 1998, The Divine David appeared in a Channel 4 television series *Later On 4* and, most recently, in *The Divine David Heals* (Feb 2000), presenting 'entertainment at the expense of ordinary people' and the work of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence continues with the opening of a new House in Manchester in 1997, the year in which Robert O'Neill Crossman ('Mother Lubricious') died.

There have also been developments and critiques from within sections of various Queer sub-cultures regarding the notion of 'queer', such as Simpson's *Anti-Gay* and the development of the term 'pomosexual' in Queen and Schimel's *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality*, both of which I touched on in

Chapter Two. These question the use of term itself and its appropriation by the various Queer communities, calling for a new discourse of gender and identity altogether. There has also been the rise of the ‘transmen’, featured in *Fluid Magazine* (May 1999), a development of the gender transgressive position epitomized by artists like Della Grace, now known as Del La Grace, who do not seek gender re-assignment but to alter their physical appearances so as to reflect the liminoid position that expresses their non-compliance with the gender binary.

My own position has been that of a dramatherapist who has been excited by the search for images in performance that embody the positions and behaviours exemplified by the clients I worked with in my clinical practice. This has presented certain difficulties and dilemmas throughout this research and study. My concern as a dramatherapist has been my work with clients on their own self-identity issues. This led me to the starting point of this study that took the notions of ‘identity’ and ‘gender’ as ‘givens’ within the context of therapy. The analytic process of the study involved me in a questioning of the usefulness of these notions and led me to take a position of limiting the analysis of the performance material to a context in which these notions are treated as ‘givens’.

My own position as a gay man who acknowledges the term ‘queer’ as it has been appropriated by the gay and lesbian culture and who identifies as a Queer dramatherapist, enhanced my engagement with the Queer identification of the performers. It also led, however, to a certain degree of concern that my own personal process might somehow ‘contaminate’ the analysis. This led me to take as objective, scientific and ‘clinical’ an approach as possible, which I decided would be usefully served by presenting the thesis in a form that borrowed from anthropological models.

This, in turn, led to a worry that I was to some extent ‘betraying’ these individuals and performers by attempting to subject them to an academic and analytic frame in order to ‘fix’ them in a way that is incongruent with their transgressive and ‘unfixable’ desires and self-identifications.

The same concern with clinical objectivity led to difficulties that stem from attempting to present an analysis of Queer performance. The requirements of an academic thesis necessitate some degree of categorical formulation. In choosing to present the analysis in as objective a manner as possible, I circumscribed the research material within specific theoretical models and conceptual frames that I considered to be useful in understanding and describing the performances, as well as in exploring the relationship that these performances might have with carnival and the Grotesque. These choices, arguably, imposed limitations on the study itself, and on the subject of the study, gender transgressive images in Queer performance. As Michael Wilson has said, Queer ‘is not an academic or rigorous category’, but is an ‘unfixed and an intuitive one’ (*ibid.* p 20).

## Appendix A

### The Interviews

#### INTERVIEW 1. Robert O'Neill Crossman ( Mother Lubricious of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence) (Jan. 1996)

BB: So what's it all about - the work of the Sisters? It looks very anarchic, a send-up and a piss-take and yet there also seems to be dead seriousness behind it.

ML: Well, the seriousness behind it is that if we don't wise up about HIV more people are going to die. I mean, basically, the Sisters are there because - the reason I joined the Sisters - was so that people get a chance to talk about Sex and Relationships and Safer Sex. And the reason we wear the Pre-Vatican Two habit is that people recognize those as nuns' habits and people find it easier to talk to a nun. Very rarely do you get abused or attacked. You lose ego when you're in the habit - when you're in 'nunsona' - and people just come up and talk to you. So that happens - like, going amongst the Gathered Faithful -

BB: Who are the 'Gathered Faithful'?

ML: Anybody who isn't a nun.

BB: Anyone at all? Anyone on the street?

ML: Yeah.

BB: So it doesn't have to be people who are gay or lesbian.

ML: No. Gosh, no. It's anybody at all. I've had some of my best conversations with people who don't identify as gay. I once had a brilliant conversation with a Franciscan nun who was wearing a new habit on a plane from Auckland to Los Angeles. So you don't have to identify as being lesbian or gay at all to be part of the Gathered Faithful.

BB: So when you get in your nun persona it's for particular events and functions?

ML: Or you just go out in your habit.

BB: Like a tranny would get up in drag and go down the street.

ML: Well, no, a tranny is going out in drag. I'm just putting my habit on because I am a nun. I'm not a pretend nun. I am a nun, alright? So I put my habit on and I go out in habit. I manifest.

- BB: And the fact that you are a 'male nun'. A 'nun' is generally female. So how does this work? You say you're not in drag and yet you are a man and you are a nun and nuns are usually women.
- ML: They usually are - yes. We've actually got female Sisters as well. They tend to call themselves Brothers. I think, originally when it first began in America, there was a tendency to ridicule the Catholic Church, the established Church. That's not what we do. We just use the, perhaps, sub-Bowdlerized version of some of the Church ceremonies but it's not intended to ridicule them or anything like that. People recognize the Form, right? And so can understand, partly, what we're on about. Some of the Sisters do actually go in for some kind of pastiche of Catholic Masses.
- BB: Well, the whole organization, if it can be called that, does seem to be a kind of pastiche of the Catholic Church. You have saints, for instance. Tony Whitehead and Derek Jarman were canonized. Is it a kind of alternative version of the Catholic Church?
- ML: There are quite a number of recovering Catholics in the Sisterhood but there are other people who haven't been to a church in their entire lives. I mean, those of us who aren't former Catholics or recovering Catholics, I suppose, find it easy to talk theology because sometimes we are challenged by people. I don't see it as pastiche of Catholicity at all. I actually use the symbolism of a nun. I have quite serious conversations with people.
- BB: So when you go out as Mother Lubricious, not on an 'event' but just as yourself, are you doing a performance, do you think?
- ML: Well, I am in a sense because I lose being 'Robert' and I become Mother Lubricious or Sister Kiss My Arse Goodbye, which was my previous name, and people recognize me.
- BB: What was that?
- ML: Sister Kiss My Arse Goodbye. I had to have a colostomy bag. I thought it was a good idea to recognize it in nunsona. I think some people think I'm performing and those are the people who challenge and get a bit negative and start having a go. One of my worst experiences was after the Gay Pride celebration last year. I went to get a cab late at night at a place near where the Pride Festival had been and a man who was quite drunk had a go at me. He said I was taking the piss out of the Catholic Church and all the rest of it and, of course, I stayed in nunsona and I didn't respond in the way he wanted me to. I dealt with it in the way a nun would. I just listened and said things like, 'Oh, really. That's very interesting. Where did you get that idea from?' He gradually calmed down eventually.
- BB: So how do you respond to that? I mean, there you are, 'Robert' - albeit in your nun persona talking to this man. He related to you as if you were somebody

taking the piss and you spoke to him as 'Mother Lubricious'. So how would you see his response - like a member of an audience who was heckling?

ML: Almost, almost. He wanted to wind me up and he was going on about, 'You're taking the piss' and I said, 'No, I'm not. The reason I'm dressed like this is because I am a nun and people find it easy to talk to me about sex and relationships and things'. But he really wasn't with it. His listening skills were not of the highest order. What was interesting was that the other people in the cab office became like a supportive audience and started to sort of defend me though I don't think they completely understood. But they certainly didn't want me to be attacked. It was quite scary, 'cause everybody had to run up the road 'cause it was like trying to get away from this man who was attacking me which, of course, isn't easy in a chiffon habit. But sometimes we do perform, yeah. When we have a ceremony or something or when we've got a demonstration. We do quite a lot of stuff with 'Outrage' - demonstrations on Public Order Changes and the Criminal Justice Act and that kind of thing and ceremonies like the Joining Ceremony which is a cross between a performance and something real going on. Yeah? We kind of have some templates of events and they are adapted or customized for whoever wants to write them down.

BB: Right, so what is the structure? Is there a structure to the Sisters?

ML: We're a democratic organization. Just because somebody's called a 'Mother' doesn't mean that they're in charge. In fact, they're called 'Mother Inferior'.

BB: So there's an inversion of things -

ML: Yeah. 'Course it is. Because, I suppose, in that sense it is about attacking the established order. Mothers are there because they've been nuns a while and know the ropes and usually are fairly well organized.

BB: So what is the basic order of things?

ML: Well, I'm a Mother of the Canterbury House. We have conclave twice a year. We all meet in habit. And usually there's someone who wants to profess or someone who wants to become a novice. So we have a ceremony when they are clothed in each item of their habit. And there is a form of words for that. They adopt their nun names. So that is a kind of straight lift, I suppose, from the established church. And then we have 'nunctions' about once a month when we meet together.

BB: It's a social occasion?

ML: Yeah, but we also do business. Those are nunctions as opposed to functions.

BB: What kind of business?

- ML: We have a list of the various events we may be taking part in during the next period. We agree canonizations. We accept nominations and sponsorships for new novices. You have to be a novice for a year and a day before you can profess.
- BB: What do you have to do during that year and a day?
- ML: You have to manifest at least three times in habit. It's called 'Cracking the Habit'. And you'll be looked after by the Novice Mistress. So if you're uneasy about anything you go to the Novice Mistress. And there's usually some other nun who will mentor you and this usually results in nuncest which is the coming together of two or more Sisters.
- BB: And it works exactly the same for the female nuns?
- ML: Yeah. When any female members become Sisters they identify as Gay Male Nuns.
- BB: This is where I find it interesting - where the biological gender isn't necessarily functioning as the focus point of identity, in the same way as people might expect. So it isn't really cross-dressing that goes on. It's a kind of pastiche of cross-dressing itself, in a sense. Like in the straight world the kind of thing Danny La Rue would do in that he would be seen as becoming a Dame, like in the pantomimes. That is not what's going on with the Sisters.
- ML: No, you're right. It isn't. It's like a persona that you take. You actually lose the ego, in a sense.
- BB: Is it a bit like what Charles Ludlam from the Ridiculous Theatre Co. in the States would have said, 'I'm not getting up in drag, I'm actually portraying Camille throughout the performance. Therefore, I am Charles Ludlam but I am also Camille'? But whereas Ludlam was concerned with the performance aspect in its theatrical sense it seems to me that the Sisters go beyond that or under that in some way.
- ML: Yeah, yeah. We're challenging ego, really. We're saying, 'We have a function'. And our function is to spread Universal Joy and Expiate Stigmatic Guilt. So, for instance, if we meet someone who puts themselves down for being gay or whatever we have an answer for them for why they're doing it.
- BB: I suppose one might ask the question why nuns? Why Mother Whoever? Why not Father or Brother?
- ML: Because of the thing about masculine and feminine and the undermining of it all. Nuns are very powerful women, you know. And also, the thing about people being prepared to disclose or talk to a nun differently about all sorts of things rather than to me as Robert or you, perhaps. And also, the thing about the nun's

costume being recognizable by most people as being nothing else but a nun's habit. There's no getting away from that. And also it symbolized for some people a system of oppression for centuries.

BB: One could say that the whole thing about putting on a habit puts a separation between you and other people. It could be seen as a defence. You are then trying to change other people's systems of defence which is heterosexuality, homosexuality, maleness, femaleness etc.

ML: Could be, yes. Or we could all be dressed in 501s, steel-rimmed glasses, twenty-four-holed Doc Martins and white T-shirts, couldn't we? Or we could be dressed in leather? Or we could be all wearing fashionable gear?

BB: For instance would it be possible for a Sister to be dressed in a leather habit?

ML: Oh, yes. They wear leather habits in Sydney. Totally leather. Whatever the Sisters' particular focus is can be reflected in their habits. They can wear handcuffs with their leather habits, if they want to. I particularly like the colour pink and my veil is lined with pink satin. Other Sisters wear short habits. They want to show their legs off. But, I mean, I'm not really defensive about this. Because I go on to the scene and I see people dressed identically, but nobody would accuse them of operating from a position of safety in order to be queer, do you see? It's just that we happen to be dressed in a habit which for some people symbolizes oppression and we're turning it on its head.

BB: That could be an important reason why. If one was up for a rational reason to the questions 'Why habits?' or 'Why nuns?' it would be because they are seen as symbols of centuries of oppression.

ML: Yeah. We're turning it into something joyful.

BB: Whereas trainers and T-shirts and 501s don't necessarily symbolize that?

ML: Well, they certainly symbolize a kind of safety. Mind you, you've got to be under twenty-five and thin! Where's my poster? I must show you this. I'm really proud of this! I was the subject of a poster for World Aids Day. You see? And it's making a point, isn't it? I'm cultivating a halo! Some of us are holier than thou! And somebody said to me that it's been absolutely devastating seeing that put around as a poster for them.

BB: Why?

ML: Well, 'cause it's a picture of a nun, right? And it's a nun with a bit of a wink in her eye! Rather like the nun from Hell.

BB: Now, supposing somebody said to you, 'Come on, it's all just a gas. You just want to dress up as a nun because you're working through things about

yourself'.

ML: Could be.

BB: 'And all the other stuff is just sort of justifying it in some way.'

ML: Well, could be. I don't know. Well, the point is that whilst I'm doing this people are having a joyful experience. We're spreading the message that being queer is nothing to be ashamed of, there's no guilt associated with sex as far as we're concerned and you don't blame somebody else for your situation. You take responsibility for yourself. Now if people learn something about that whilst I'm out there in my habit having a good time, so what if I am working off something personally. Does it matter? I probably reach a lot more people than people who are serious about everything.

BB: There also seems to be a kind of Dionysian-Bacchanalian aspect to it all which links it with carnival, topsy-turvydom, medieval foolery - that kind of thing.

ML: Holy Fools! Yes, you could call the Sisters Holy theatre, if you like. Because that also had a serious point to make. Like Medieval Feast of Fools and Mystery Plays etc, which everybody went to see. I did that once in the Cotswolds one summer. And people wanted to talk seriously about the issues in those plays.

BB: Part of my work is looking at Queer performance, Queer images in terms of carnival in which carnival can be seen as a state of mind, rather than carnival as an event. And also, being aware of the rather disturbing tendency in current legislative attempts to limit carnival in the same way as May Day is moved and shifted from its traditional significance in the contemporary political world. It seems to be important why one needs to mark carnival as a state of mind in a particular way and Queer performance being part of that state of mind, the undermining and the challenging and the topsy-turvydom which carnival would have originally done. What's your view on that?

ML: Oh, I agree with you there because that's where my politics is throughout my life. I identified with the Labour Movement for over twenty-five years. Throughout that time I was always finding things very, very funny. I could see the ridiculous procedures of Standing Orders and, you know, the bustle of official and officious business and I've always tried to inject some kind of hilarity. That's not to say I was trivializing things, because I think if you're having a good time you actually learn very well. The best kind of teaching in primary schools is where they keep the kids moving, make a lot of noise. They all go back the next day. So, for politics - and I can think from my own experience of turning the whole thing on its head - I was the very first Queer Mayor in the world! Ten years ago. And the bloke I was living with, my lover, he became my Official Companion. We didn't have a Mayoress. And people knew there was this queer mayor about so they wondered what the fuck they would get when I turned up for an event. So I turned up in a three-piece striped

suit wearing my chain of office, looking the part - as a Mayor. As George Bernard Shaw said - if you're going to do unconventional things, look conventional whilst you're doing them. So out of my mouth would come this most extraordinary stuff and people would seem to take it in 'cause I was the Mayor and I was standing there wearing £50,000 worth of gold and sapphires and diamonds, all at once no questions asked. All this stuff about men wearing jewellery - I was wearing it every day of the week! And my driving force as Mayor was to enable people to have fun. That's what I did. I did Open House at the Town Hall. People could come and sing every Saturday morning. I'd get them singing. I'd get people to tell me their life stories, using that symbol of the Chief Citizen. And I think we must do it. Use those opportunities. It clicks the door open for us. I got invited to some places I would never have been invited to as a terrible left winger. And in all the fun and singing people got talking about very serious issues and making a lot of money. And so I think I'm consistently doing the same thing with the Sisters and I'm sure there are other people in the Sisters who've had similar experiences to me in respect to the politics and work life as well. So it's all a quite serious thing, then.

BB: Coming back to the gender question and the words one uses for gender, while you are Mother Lubricious you would be referred to as 'she', would you?

ML: No. Not often. Not always. They generally refer to me as 'he'. I don't mind them calling me 'she'. Some Sisters are very strong about that. They won't allow men to call each other 'she'. They insist on being called 'he'.

BB: Even in their nun's manifestation?

ML: Yeah.

BB: So that insistence is about referring back to the biological gender of maleness - being a man?

ML: Not really. It's the gay maleness of the nun-ness, if we can say that. I don't mind being called 'she' but some nuns would insist on being called 'he'. I don't give a shite myself.

BB: Would you know why they would insist on that? After all, there you are dressed in the garb of a nun, who in the Catholic Church is a woman and you're being called 'Mother' or 'Sister' or whatever - is this not inviting people to call you 'she' as you are presenting as a woman? So what would be the difference if you were being called 'she'?

ML: Well, this is where we came in. I'm not 'presenting' as a woman. I am a gay male nun, a Queer Nun. For me, there is no difference. But some people do think that people shouldn't call each other 'she'.

BB: So there is no Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence policy on this.

- ML: No. Fortunately. I mean, we do have rows about it. In Sydney there was a big row about it while I was there, because Mother Abyss ('Abcess' they call him behind his back) is always referred to as 'he' rather than 'she'. But other Sisters were calling each other 'she'. He was actually a Norbertine Father. Now he's actually an Anglican. He's a member of the Synod. This is him in his secular life -
- BB: Which is not secular.
- ML: Which is secular because it is outside his life within the Sisterhood. I'm an active member of the Society of Friends. I'm a Quaker. Fortunately, I belong to a Meeting which is quite queer-friendly and people think it's an absolute hoot that I'm a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence. They're not phased by it at all. It's another way of expressing your journey in Life. And that's what being a 'believer' is about.
- BB: You said earlier that Catholics sometimes are critical of you or hostile towards your activities. What about the Gay Christians of any persuasion?
- ML: No, no, not at all. In fact, some of the best conversations I've had have been with members of the Vulgar Church. That's what we call the established Church, the Vulgar Church. We have no intention to be sacrilegious therefore we don't hurt anybody. Sacrilege is not the intention. We are not there to attack anybody else. We've just borrowed their Form. We're not there to attack anybody - except people who attack the queer community but even then we do it with a sense of mission which is to spread Universal Joy and expiate Stigmatic Guilt.
- BB: Earlier on you talked about two lesbians who were extremely hostile to you on one occasion. Now some people may say on the one hand that you say you are here promoting joy and so on and yet what about those two lesbians and other people who don't experience joy as a result of your events? Does that become part of your responsibility that you make them angry or upset them?
- ML: No. They decided to get upset. They're responsible for that. I take no responsibility for the way that they're feeling.
- BB: Similar, I suppose to a lot of performers who would say that hostility or heckling was the audience's response to their show but that is the audience's part and not the performer's?
- ML: Well, it's what they bring with them, isn't it?

## INTERVIEW 2. Dave Lynn (Feb. 1996)

- DL: It all started when I was sixteen and a girlfriend took me to 'The Black Cap' for a drink and she had seen a drag artist and wanted me to see one. In those days I used to mime at home and lip-sync to records from my parents' parties, so when I saw what she was doing on stage it was very similar to what I had been doing at home. Then, eventually, there was a talent contest at 'The Black Cap' and she said, 'Why don't you have a go?' So I did. That's how I started.
- BB: And you've been in it for how long, then?
- DL: Twenty years.
- BB: Now, a lot of people have their characters, you know, like Lily Savage. They have a fictional character that is not them, as such. You are Dave Lynn. What are you performing? I mean, are you a fella in a frock or -?
- DL: Yeah. Well, there is a character called Dave Lynn but I wanted that character to be as real as possible - a man dressed up in women's clothes - because that was the original funny side of dressing up. You didn't do it because you wanted to look like a woman. Well, I didn't. You did it because it would make people laugh. At that time, to have changed my name to a feminine title didn't occur to me. It didn't make sense. And there is a background to the character and I talk about it because the character is real.
- BB: From your own life? I mean, you do a lot of Jewish stuff and you say, 'Well, I'm Jewish and etc.etc...'
- DL: It's generally very true. I talk about my mother being a Jewish mother and the situations in which we have been in our lives. Just recently, for instance, we were talking about it to the Press - our relationship - so it's actually as funny as making up a biography. Also, I feel I would have to live a second life if I had another character.
- BB: There are people like Jimmy Trollette and Lee Paris, Colin (from Dressed Roughly As Girls, when he works solo) and yourself who keep their names and perform as themselves but in drag. So why drag, then?
- DL: Well, it depends. For me, I was no great shakes as a singer or an actor or a dancer or a comic and the drag kind of put that final moulding on it because I found it amusing to me in drag. It was a kind of cheeky feeling come over me and that cheeky feeling turned itself into a kind of humour. And so, you can excel at one thing but you can do everything with the drag. You are acting every night because it doesn't matter what mood you're in, you still have to go on and act. A cabaret act just 'happens'. And as Malitza and I always work 'ad lib', generally speaking, you have to put it on. So, there's an acting side to it. We sing and we chat. It's humorous. So it combines everything but with the added

icing of the fact that we are both in drag. Drag should be funny. There are different sorts of drag. You've got the 'new wave drag' where they look incredibly good. But it's still with humour.

BB: Yeah, there are different kinds of styles. Now, Malitza is definitely more funny to look at than you are. And she has got more of a formed character who is not Michael.

DL: Yeah. Well, it is Michael but he calls herself Malitza.

BB: On the other hand, you look quite glamorous. Is that sort of intentional?

DL: Oh, yeah.

BB: You don't have clownish make-up on or anything like that -

DL: Well, that's daft. Because it's too obvious. If you wear grotesque make-up it's too obvious. Don't forget - the look is about three minutes worth of attention, what they notice when you first walk on. Then the act and the personalities take over. I know people who say, 'Right, I'll never watch a drag act!' but if they come and watch a drag act for an hour, they'll forget - if the artist in question is good - they'll forget that they are in drag or that they never wanted to see them in drag. You'll be taking note of what they do. The effect of the look is just like anything. Like a new suit. 'Oh, how lovely! How are you?' And it's the same with drag. First impression. I mean, Malitza doesn't actually wear comical make-up. That's how she feels she wants to look. I want to look glamorous because I'm vain. If I see a beautiful woman or a fantastic glamorous-looking dress, I want to wear it. But it doesn't mean that it's a 'turn-on' or anything like that. It just means that I like to look good.

BB: Yeah. But that at the same time, it doesn't look like you're convincingly trying to be a woman, either.

DL: No.

BB: For instance, your breast paddings - you take them out and use them as props. I've seen you use it as a Jewish hat, as a hamburger, as all sorts of things. Now, it doesn't seem to me that any person wanting to come across convincingly as a woman would do that kind of thing. I can't imagine Rupaul doing that or Danny La Rue. One night I saw a performance of yours at the Vauxhall and there was a guy with a hamburger stall just outside and he had a temporary franchise with the pub, I think, at the time, to sell these hamburgers and you kind of gave him a plug for his hamburgers by taking out your breasts and proceeding to make a hamburger out of them and eating them! That's the kind of clowning, fooling around which you seem to do more of than some other people that I see. Is that all intentional?

DL: Yeah. It's natural. It's what I feel. You see, the point of looking good is that you then take that good look and then do something silly with it! I'm speaking strictly from my own personal view of it. I don't think of myself as a woman or even as coming across as a woman when I'm up there. I think of myself as a glamorous drag artist. I can't take it too seriously because I'm not a woman. Those breasts are not real and there's no point in pretending that they are! And it's funny to pull out a 'falsie' and do something ridiculous with it. In Brighton I walk up and down the street and talk to people in sequined dresses. It's ridiculous! But that's the fun side of it. Sure some people may be misogynistic and mock women by putting on high pitched voices and exaggerated gestures and things but I don't. And it's the same in my performances. I don't do like the 'school for trannies' where fellas walk and stand and nuance like a woman is supposed to do because that's a lot of hoey. And the reason why Michael and I do work well together is that we both think on the same wavelength. Michael likes this naturalness. Because when he first started working for me he was really Countess Malitza. And I think over the last three years he's dropped the airs of Malitza and become more of a drag artist. Malitza's name just worked very nicely with the act. The Countess was dropped because it wouldn't do. It came over as half of Hinge and Brackett working with an Essex girl! So we dropped the Countess and we dropped that style.

BB: Hinge and Brackett have actual characters. They are Perry and George Logan. They are not being Perry and George at all when they're performing Dame Hilda and Doctor Evadne. But in your performances there are parts of you and Michael very much in the background of the performances.

DL: Very much so.

BB: You say you 'ad lib' a lot. But it's not all 'ad lib'.

DL: No, no.

BB: So do you script quite a bit? How much do you script?

DL: Well, we have done and we used to when we first met but we found with working so regularly on the scene you have to work on the level of them. And sometimes the scripted stuff is wrong. You have to have the ability to change. Malitza's brilliant. She can change the music in the middle of any song. But I will change track through the show. So we never actually go, 'Well, we'll do this for the first quarter of an hour, this for the second quarter of an hour, this for the last quarter of an hour'. It never works like that. In our minds something has bonded and we kind of know where we're going. When I start something he knows that I'm leading to the time when I go off and change, for example. So there's a kind of understanding. At the moment we're just writing a whole show for the Pavilion Theatre.

BB: Is that show any different in its nature from the shows you do in the bars?

- DL: No. I want to keep the same sort of feeling but it obviously can't be the same - for a start we're going to have other musicians with us, guests artists with us. We'll be doing stuff that we've talked about. I've written a script in the 'patter' sense because in a theatre you don't know who's going to come in. It could be gay people, it could be straight people. It could be a mix of both. You need something for everybody. But when we do this, we're going to continue this theatre show and carry on with the shows in the pubs and you'll see a difference, I think, in what happens to the pub acts. We've needed to freshen up.
- BB: So when you say you script a lot of your material, do you have a scenario which you kind of keep to - do you actually rehearse the jokes or something?
- DL: No, we never rehearse a joke. It doesn't work. We did try rehearsing. I mean, we tend to bounce off each other. If you catch us on a very together night with a good crowd there's an incredible sort of rapport. I will tell Malitza what I've been up to like a story that happened to me when I went out as I'm telling the audience but she wouldn't have heard me say it before but she'll interact very well with it. But it's so natural, the conversation. I hate timed gags. I've just spent five weeks in panto where everything was timed. It's fab and I love it but the excitement of getting a laugh over something that's just come off the top of your head is great. It doesn't always work...
- BB: So a lot of the thing would be the dynamic of what's happening between you and the audience?
- DL: You see, we're not like Lee and Jimmy. We're not really a double act. We're two artists who choose to work together. It started with Malitza coming to accompany me as Michael. And he looked such a mess that I made him drag up. I knew he did a character called Malitza at private 'dos'. But from the first time he played for me which was a dreadful night. We couldn't get anything together at all but it was a lovely thing. I wouldn't say we were best friends. I would say there was a wonderful bonding. We understand each other with a look. It started straight away. When we started doing the act we went through the phase of loving each other, having a great time, then we went through six months of really disliking each other. Malitza who hadn't really been doing an act started finding herself the centre of attention and it was too much for him. And she's a very typical Leo and as sensible as he is, as psychic as he is, there's a very childish side to him. And I'd say, 'Thank God I'm the sensible one!' and he'd say, 'No, we work in different ways'. In the dressing room, Malitza's completely childish and silly and on stage she's not. With me, it's the other way around. Then we sort of just bonded and got used to working with each other. And you cannot rehearse every week.
- BB: So there's a general kind of playfulness that goes on between the two of you.
- DL: Yeah.

- BB: For instance, there's little bit that I'll always remember - you do it from time from time - where you're just about to start singing and you open your mouth but Malitza starts singing instead or saying something, distracting. And you'll stop and she'll stop. Then you're just about to start singing again and she starts. And you stop and she stops. Then you're about to start again and she's done something else on the piano. That kind of clowning - does it just kind of 'happen' or do you plan it? Like do you say, 'I'll do my cod beginning and you come in' etc.etc.?
- DL: No. That happened naturally for me in a show we were doing. I was working with Lily Savage and it happened in a number we were doing - 'I know him so well' where Lily didn't really know the song and every time I went to sing she kept trying to come in and it would go like that. And, of course, it raised the roof. It was a genuine thing. And the next time we worked together we sang it and it looked like we'd done it off the cuff. Of course, we did exactly the same thing. It's a trick I use with guests on the show. When the guest has to sing a song but I have to be with them because they've not got that long. It also helps it all to look good. I let them sing it and keep trying to come in. Or the other way round. It's a friendly trick because people love to think you've gone wrong. With Malitza and I, we don't plan when to do it. We just let it happen.
- BB: And what about the places that you work? Do you work basically in gay bars or a variety of places? And what kind of venues do you prefer to work in? Do you prefer a type of venue?
- DL: No. I like a good audience. I've done a great deal of stuff on the gay scene because that's where it's wonderful. I mean, one thing about the gay scene is that it's very hard to be accepted and when you are accepted it's harder to keep it going. It's a good challenge. It keeps acts fresh. When I first started to the shows I didn't get a lot of work on the gay scene. I used to work in Hostess Clubs.
- BB: What are they?
- DL: Well, they're kind of clubs in the West End where men go and ladies are there for them to dance with. A kind of high-class form of prostitution, in a way. All clubs had different levels of class. I used to go round the West End. You had to do about five to make your money. So I'd walk round the West End in drag cause it saved me changing. No one batted an eyelid. I used to pop into the club, do my two numbers and off I went to another club. The clubs were great to me. I was the only drag artist doing it. And I learnt to work at very close proximity to the people. But in those days I didn't sing or talk. I just mimed. But you still had to learn to work very closely. But it's very attractive to work the gay scene. When they're a good audience, they're the best in the world. Most of the stars I've ever worked with have always said, 'It must be really hard' and I've said, 'Yeah, you know, it's like anything really. If you want approval you've got to

go and back it.' It's interesting, really, how the gay scene has changed. I've been on it now for a good ten years solid and it's changed so much. But between the Hostess Clubs and the gay scene we did Northern trips etc. some of which were painful.

BB: What in straight bars?

DL: Yeah. In straight bars you'd have bouncers in front of the crowd and if you weren't that good you were just --

BB: Was there a difference in the kind of material you would do for a non-gay bar?

DL: No, I would probably stay the same. But I would tell them I was gay these days because it's a different thing. It's not such a big deal these days and then they can relax, you see. But obviously, I might change the style of some of the gags. Nowadays a lot of the places are becoming very mixed, so we're getting used to an over-all sort of audience. I think it's best if you introduce yourself to an audience - whether they're straight, gay or can't make up their minds. It lets them know your character rather than you trying to learn to be with them.

BB: Sometimes towards the beginning of your act you start picking people out, for instance, 'Are there any lesbians in tonight?', 'If there are any straight people in could you put your hands up' etc.etc. What's the reason for that?

DL: No. It's basically a bit of camp. Also, it helps you find out who's in or what kind of mood they're in. If they're going to scream out to you, 'Yes, we are!' or if two lesbians scream out you know there aren't many lesbians in the audience. It's a case of getting them to talk to you. It's letting them know that they can talk to you and letting them know where the level of the show is. It lets them know we're having a good time together.

BB: So it could be anything, not necessarily around sexuality groupings. It could be 'Are there any Jewish people in?' or 'Any coach loads from Yorkshire?'

DL: It's bringing them in and also it sets off some chatter which works into the first part of the show. To warm them up, break the ice.

BB: Your little cameo impersonations - Shirley Bassey, Kylie, Cleo Laine etc. -where you're taking the piss out of all of them, especially the Karen Carpenter one which is just you indicating the microphone stand - some people would say that those are examples where drag artists exist in order to take the piss out of women public figures. It has also been said that drag is by its very nature misogynistic. What would your reply be to that?

DL: Oh, no, I wouldn't agree with that. I mean, what's the point in being dressed up as a woman taking off men? The thing is, you see, that how that came about was that one night in Central Station I was messing about in the middle of the act

and I started asking the audience to shout out impersonations for me to do off the cuff, so to speak, and most of them shouted out women. Even the women shouted out women for me to do, like Bette Davis. It was all sort of spontaneous and natural, you see. It wasn't planned or anything like that. I have done Elvis - dead. I've had Jason Donovan screamed out and I've done him. If someone shouts out someone I've done before I'd just do something silly. Suppose someone shouts out Barbara Cartland for example - well, she wears a wig, doesn't she? So, I suppose I'd twiddle my wig around or something ridiculous like that. I don't have to do anyone, either. I sometimes say, 'You've had that!' and not actually do it. If I couldn't really do one - say I couldn't get the voice or something they get worked on over time. The ones you see are the ones that are most popular. They're not serious impersonations, they're fooling around.

BB: Is there anything that someone could shout out that you would not do because you disapproved of it? Are there any sacred cows?

DL: Not really with the impersonations because, as I say, they're just messing about really. But there are topics that I would keep away from. For instance, I've been told off in the past for doing racial gags. I said, 'Well, I don't do any racial gags' and they said, 'You do Jewish gags' and I said 'Yeah, well, I am Jewish'. And they said, 'Well, you're still belittling and making yourself a minority'. I said, 'We are a minority!' This was from gay people. It was at a time when everybody was becoming very het up and the atmosphere on the scene was very political. It actually is good if you can stay away from those sort of gags. I got a letter at Duke's from a Jewish man. It was a complimentary letter but there was a huge telling off in it. He said that he used to love to come to see the act but he got fed up with me talking about the Jews and the Jewish gags. He'd lost relatives in the War - and this is the awful side of me! - I hate it all. I mean, I can't watch 'Schindler's List' because I'm Jewish and I saw it all at school. And I was upset by the letter because he said he and his friends would have to stop coming to see me if I didn't stop using these things against Jews. And Malitza said this was the sort of thing I'd have to put up with because I do talk like that and if they don't know that I'm joking then... But I said that I could see how they'd feel because sometimes I go and see a comic or whatever and they tell some gag and I think, 'Well, I don't like that'. And I went on to do the show, hoping he was in and said that I'd had this letter (I didn't want to mention his name) and that I was sorry that he'd lost his relatives but that I had been on to Helpline on his behalf! This slipped out! And, funny thing was that I was going to be totally serious. I had meant to apologize but it just came out like that! It's just something, I think, about being in drag - I can see the funny side of everything. But the subject I won't talk about is AIDS. Only because I remember when it first hit the country and what happened. I think everybody deals with it. But it's not really a joking subject. I saw somebody on television who had HIV and was doing gags but as funny as I think he was, I also thought it was tragic. It's just not a funny subject. It's like Cancer. So I keep away from that sort of thing, people's inadequacies.

BB: There is a viewpoint that says that any cabaret artist, comic, comedian of

whatever kind, if they are being subversive in their entertainment then one of the things they need to do is to undercut all these areas of seriousness that people could be being precious about because it kind of releases a whole load of feelings and tensions that are swept under the carpet usually.

DL: Oh, yes, I do. I do Patsy Cline, for instance. I go crashing into the wall. Yes, it's obviously the way you do that. I know it's terrible. But I'm afraid of flying. And if this guy was to talk to me and tell me off about it I would say, 'Every time I do that gag I think I could be on a 'plane the next day.' But that's not the point. I mean, she's not upset about it now. So many people come up about that Patsy Cline gag and love it. I don't think I've ever had anybody say anything bad about it. I've never found anything I've found amusing about HIV but if I did - oh, yes, actually I have used HIV. You see, I'm lying already.

BB: But it's not prominent in your shows.

DL: I don't look for things to make gags about. But if something really attracts my attention I will go for it. I won't think about it. It would have to be on the spur of the moment. I can't think about it. On the other hand, if I do take the piss out of things, I have to pay the price because when I go out socially a lot of the reaction I get from the pubs is 'Don't let him near me!' and the punters take the piss back. But that's what I set myself up for. There have been times on the stage when I actually have been furious.

BB: I've seen you turn a whole atmosphere of coolness or even hostility around. I've seen you at a show in the Vauxhall Tavern when someone was giving you a lot of lip and obviously getting you very, very angry. Everyone else was getting pissed off with him, too. Towards the end of the show you began to do 'Hav'a Nagila' and he began to dance at the front of the stage along with everybody else. You'd won him over. The whole atmosphere of antagonism had changed. Are you aware of this? Are you aware of that ability of yours - and Malitza's, of course?

DL: No, not really. If it happens, I think it's probably the way we work. Any artist who feels that there's hostility or coldness, you do pull out the stops to try and win them over. I went through the stage of expecting the audience to be marvellous but that's not really on. I know that I can work damn hard and I'll do half an hour extra if I feel that we've got a chance of winning. But I don't consciously do it or talk to her about it. I get the feeling from the crowd. I can tell who's hostile, who's enjoying it but can't show it. You can feel if they're in the mood to let their hair down and have a laugh. You know when they are a bit pissed. I don't know, there's this funny feeling that I get that she picks up on.

BB: I want to pick up on the Jewish thing once more. I've seen you do something which you called The Passover Story or something like that. It's very camp and quite funny. Are you appreciating it while you're doing it? Are you celebrating it or are you subverting it? Is there an irreverence about it? Or what?

DL: No. I love the religion. I think it's wonderful. I wish I had more time to be involved in it. But religion to me is really just a word. When I was at school I was a terrible pupil. I got expelled but I adored our religion because the stories were great. If Disney took a Jewish story it would just be brilliant. The thing about the Jewish people is that if you look really carefully - that's what happened, I started to watch people - and if you look, all these little things that drag queens do, or really good comedians do, there's a little bit of a Jewish woman there somewhere. If you look at a Jewish woman, she'll overdress and take something off instead of being subtle and then putting something on. Their hair will have to be bigger and brighter. It was all kind of 'draggy' and, I thought, this religion must have a wonderful sense of humour. And all my uncles tell jokes constantly. They drove us mad. So I just thought it was such wonderful humour and as I know the Bible stories very well. I won awards for Religious Knowledge at school - and as Passover comes near Easter I thought I do something on Passover. The public were great with it. I actually told one audience the whole story leading up to my bar-mitzvah.

BB: And all this material is factually based in your past?

DL: Yeah. A lot of the stories I've told - like about my mother and someone who at one time was her best friend. I tell stories about those two because the funniest things happened. I was taking them somewhere and they both had to sit at the back of the car to talk and if you could have heard the comments as the driver could hear - they were both so funny! It's not funny to me now but at the time, when I was doing it, it was extremely funny! My parents were never staunch Jews. We were more middle-of-the-road Jews. So, no I'm very proud of it all. That's why I said, if I had another character like Dockyard Doris or Lily Savage it would still have been me with another name.

BB: Now, your 'Oliver' story that you've done with Malitza and sometimes with Maisie Trollette as well. There's still the underlying Jewishness there and with Malitza, again, you can see this element of Jewishness coming over at times, in the mannerisms and the gestures and the portrayal of Fagin etc... But you also have a lot in there about rent boys instead of pickpockets. Where did all that come from?

DL: I don't know. Before I met Malitza I used to sing a medley of 'Oliver' songs. It was my favourite musical. I was just singing it and I don't know - I got started messing around with it and getting more verbal. I started to chat between the songs and that led into Fagin singing 'Got to feel a packet or two'. So that's all I had, that song. And then when I sat down with Malitza I sang a whole story. And then thought it was silly as she was there I thought she might as well join in, as well. So I made her Oliver. And it all happened there on the night. I would stop the show and said, 'No, no, we'll do it this way'. And then Maisie would have been in one night and she would then have been included. It would all just have come to me.

- BB: All that fluidity really comes across because you're all going in and out of different roles there. And that kind of fluidity seems to be an extension of the fluidity that is in your performances. I mean, you're not Dave singing a song, you're in and out of storytelling, bantering with the audience, doing impersonations, telling jokes. It's not like Danny La Rue who is less fluid. He is there and sings a song and does a bit of patter, goes off, gets into another dress, comes on and sings another song. Your performances don't seem to be like that.
- DL: It would drive me mad, that. It's like me in real life. I jump from one subject to another. I don't want to lose them even for a second. So, I suppose subconsciously, I won't stick to a one song thing. People go mad at that. They say, 'Finish the bloody song'. I can't help it. It just happens on the night. My brain's ticking.
- BB: So, what you do on any one night takes shape from the audience, the kind of reactions of the audience and so on.
- DL: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
- BB: Within the 'Oliver' show, there's another question I wanted to touch on. I saw it one night when you were doing a residency at the Vauxhall Tavern. Maisie Trollette was a guest on the show. You were all using the words 'he' and 'she' as if they were substitutes for each other, as if it didn't matter. For instance, while you were all going and out several roles very swiftly you would narrate the story and come to the Fagin part and say 'He was there' and then Maisie would be doing the Fagin part and then the word would change to 'she'. I've seen you do the same kind of thing in audiences at 'The Two Brewers' as well. You'd refer to some guy in the audience as 'he' and then very shortly afterwards you would also use 'she' when you're talking about the same guy. You tend to use 'he' and 'she' as if they were interchangeable. Does that signify that to you in your performances gender is interchangeable?
- DL: Yeah. I call most men 'she'. I don't, however, call lesbians or women 'he'.
- BB: What's the underlying thing to that - calling men 'she' and 'he' as well.
- DL: This is something about me. I call men 'she'. Even my father - if he behaves - I say, 'She's got the hump'. It's an inference on the word 'she' - it's the sound of the word 'she'. It came about I kept calling artists 'he' when I was working with people like Hinge and Brackett. It was very hard to say 'he'. I actually called Dr. Evadne 'George' once. It was very, very hard. And Malitza was the worst. He didn't want anyone to know. He was going to pretend to be a real woman. Everything had to become 'she'. In the Oliver thing you do get confused between the 'he' and the 'she' because Maisie or Malitza is a drag queen and is 'she' playing Fagin who is a 'he' but then men being referred to as 'she', yes, it gets confusing.

- BB: I wonder if that confusion is really so much part of the act, your whole performance that it's actually deliberate.
- DL: I think a lot of it is. That humour has to come from within you. There are people who can teach themselves to be funny. There are other people who just have 'something' inside them. Maisie is one of these people. And so is Michael. It's very easy to be funny when you're surrounded by people who are naturally funny, who don't obviously try to be funny. People will quote Maisie because of the way she says things. She's naturally a funny human being. Malaichael (oops!) Malitza - he's like that. He'll say something that will crack me up. I've had to get used to him. He's got lovely little habits in the dressing room. If he's got nothing to say but doesn't want to be left out he'll sort of go 'Mm-mm-mm-' (wiggling hands). I don't think he realizes he does that. And it's just the funniest thing and I look at him thinking, 'What's she up to?' On the other hand, if he's quiet I will know he's in a bad mood.
- BB: You've done it now, you see? Talking about Michael you've said 'What's she up to' and then also 'he' will do something. It's this interchangeability of 'he' and 'she' that I'm referring to.
- DL: 'She' is the lighthearted side. 'He' is usually the down side. It's the flamboyancy of the job. We are obviously camp. The confusion of 'he' and 'she' used at the same time almost about the same person is part of the campness, the clowning.
- BB: And that presumably is the essence of the kind of drag that you do as opposed to the kind of drag Danny La Rue would do.
- DL: Yeah.
- BB: He would not expect people necessarily to laugh at him. Presumably he would expect people to appreciate what he's doing.
- DL: Yeah. Well, Danny's clever. I don't think one should pick and say 'I don't like this, I don't like that'. Everyone has their own style. To sit and pick would be wrong. In Danny's day he was brilliant. He isn't a funny hysterical man. He isn't a brilliant singer. He looked good but he wasn't as beautiful like Rupaul, for instance. But what he did was that he made it Big. Danny could come on in a dress and with a look of an eye have them laughing. And that's why he was a man in drag.
- BB: Looking at it in terms of clowning -
- DL: No, he's not a clown.
- BB: That's what I'm trying to distinguish between - the clowning kind of drag and the kind of drag that's not clowning. Danny isn't a clown.

DL: Edna's a clown.

BB: But then neither is Rupaul a clown. She seems to be taking what she's doing quite seriously.

DL: Rupaul is just a very good-looking drag queen. She's got it made, looking like that. It's a talent that quite escapes me but you can't help thinking how gorgeous she looks. Lily Savage is a clown, funnily enough. I've worked with Lily and we did 'Baby Jane' together. If you see that video you'd be amazed. What you don't see from Lily normally is that sort of performance. He's a really good actor. I watched him during 'Baby Jane' because it was the first time I'd seen us doing it on video and he was really a clown. And you can't have two clowns in a show and so I played straight to his clown. He was so cleverly a clown. He did ridiculous things. He attacked a bird-cage and stamped it to the ground. We kept it in and bought a new bird cage each night we did it. But the way he stamped all over it. That was what I call clowning. When you see women like French and Saunders - that, too, is clowning. I look at Joanna Lumley in 'Absolutely Fabulous' and I can't believe we all thought she was so.... she gives this brilliant tour-de-force performance of a character we all love. This brilliant, awful woman - and you think, 'Now, I never knew she was a clown!'

BB: There's only more thing I want to ask you about. Nowadays, you hear a lot about 'Queer performers' and 'Queer performances', the word 'Queer' being used as opposed to 'gay' or 'drag' or 'lesbian'.

DL: What, is it coming in again, to call it 'Queer'?

BB: Yeah. How do you relate to that definition?

DL: I think it's just another name. It's great actually. I think it's about time drag had a new title. I don't mind it being called 'Queer performance'. I think it's fine but I remember when people would say 'Oh, no, I'm a female impersonator!' and I'd say, 'Bollocks!'

BB: Well, that's if you are actually impersonating a female.

DL: Kate Robbins is a female impersonator. We're not. There's nothing wrong with the term 'Drag Artist'.

BB: Is a drag artist 'gay', necessarily? He could be 'straight'.

DL: You know we've been on 'Vanessa' - the programme? This very subject came up. And I said to this woman, 'Being gay, is none of your business. I hope you come and see my show and be entertained.' She said, 'I'm sure I would but if my son saw you would he become gay?' I said, 'I don't think you're being a very bright mother,' I said, 'I'm not making love to someone on the stage and I could easily be straight. I have been. I've been married. I just decided I like the

other side better.' But it would have made no difference. I still would have been a drag artist. I think it helps to be gay, though.

BB: The thing about people using the term 'Queer' would be to cover gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people - every single kind of non-heterosexual type. Like an inclusive term.

DL: 'Queer' still offends some people.

BB: I mean, you could go into some 'gay' places and people would be offended because they would think you should not be dressed in drag.

DL: Oh, yeah, definitely.

BB: And some lesbians, for instance, would think that drag is misogynistic and that just because the man is in a frock this is wrong. Whereas, the 'queer' culture is supposed to be all embracing.

DL: I do know that a lot of people are offended by drag. I know a lot of people at Pride were. I don't mind being called a Queer performer but I think the word 'queer' still offends. Perhaps, a new name should come up because with drag moving into the mainstream entertainment now the doors are open and I think the public are coming back - the straight public.

### INTERVIEW 3. Michael Topping (Malitza) (March 1996)

BB: How did you start doing Malitza?

M: I started in 1967. I was sort of recommended to open a new Club called 'The Escort' and I went along for the audition. That was my first job. I was doing it every night for two weeks and I found I didn't really have enough material so I called George Logan (Dr Evadne Hinge from Hinge and Brackett) whom I had earlier met, I think it was at the Chepstow Arms pub in my earlier forays into drag. George was playing the piano there. I had met George earlier in 1965, I think. We just got on very well and, anyway, I called him into 'The Escort.' for a couple of weeks. He got me into drag. I wouldn't go into drag. I was a bit funny. I always did the first half out of drag and the second half in drag. It was like there was a fear of it.

BB: Were you doing Malitza then?

M: I was Malitza, yes. I took the name from Militza Korjus, an opera singer who was a bit off the wall. I changed the name to Malitza. She was a stunning coloratura soprano who had a peculiar career. She did a film called 'The Great Waltz' in 1938 about Strauss, the original one. I got the name from her.

BB: What attracted you to her?

M: You know how you become a fan of someone? I played her records to everyone. She was very quirky, which is something I like and she had the most wonderful voice which I adore. And she was rather sort of an aristocrat. And a friend of mine said, 'Oh, you're a Countess now!'. So that's how it stuck as Countess Malitza.

BB: So it's a blending of Militza Korjus' name, someone you were a fan of and something within yourself that contributed to Countess Malitza?

M: And also based on the Baroness of Hove-Brighton who was a lesbian and apparently terrorized the nurses in a mental home. She was dotty. I worked with George Logan and with Patrick Fyfe (Dame Hilda Brackett). I worked with Patrick Fyfe as a man.

BB: And this was all in bars in cabaret.

M: Yes. It was really fun to work with Patrick Fyfe.

BB: Mainly gay bars?

M: No. Not all of them. We did places like the Central Hotel, I think, or the Station Hotel in Worthing. We would sing duets. But then I was always out of drag with Patrick. I was also a school teacher in the daytime. I met Doreen ----- I was

still working with Patrick and with George.

BB: Sometimes in drag and sometimes not?

M: Yes. And Doreen ----- said I couldn't continue working with Patrick if I was working with her. So I told George and Patrick and I had to make a choice. But I also felt I wasn't really ready to go public. I was much more in the background, sort of thing. So I worked with Doreen ----- . I did drag until 1974, did a tour of 'The Dancing Years', chucked all the drag away and swore I'd never do it again. She got ill and she died. I then went into healing and more or less left the music profession altogether. And then the clinic started pressurizing me. And then I started playing piano again but as myself, Michael Topping. Out of that, eventually, I started back into theatre. And then George rang me up one day, saying that he and Patrick had had a split and would I play for him and I said 'I'd love to'. I went on as his nephew - Dr Hinge and her nephew! And then I met Dave. Actually I had met him previously when I did drag once as a policewoman at The Pavilion Theatre in Brighton for a show with Dave Lynn and Adrella. We just got on instantly. Two years later George and I did The Dome for a Charity Affair and George phoned me said that we would be doing Brighton and that Dave was having some trouble and asked if I would play for him. So I played for Dave Lynn. Also, out of The Dome Concert came something else. 'Secrets' nightclub rang me and said that they couldn't afford Hinge and myself. Would I act on my own again? And would I dress up? And so I did that.

BB: So the personality of Countess Malitza - where did that character come from?

M: Yes. It's part of me. There was no planning. I sort of have a history of her in my head, which is, actually, similar to Militza Korjus. I kind of married the two together. Militza Korjus was the daughter of a Countess, Russian-Polish. My base is common. So she's actually half-common, half-refined.

BB: It's not as well defined a fictional background as say Dame Edna's or Lily Savage's, where they have built up husbands and mothers etc.

M: Oh, no. I have all that somewhere in the back of my head and I could answer that if necessary but I never use it in the performances. I know what she's like. She's been dragged back on to the stage out of retirement, which is really what sort of happened to me. Sort of reluctantly being there. She's not really that fussed over being on stage. She enjoys being there but she's not ambitious and half the time she's thinking, 'I couldn't really be bothered'. Other people tell me things about it like, 'We watched you from the wings. David was talking to you and you were wiping the keyboard!'. Or I'm just distracted fiddling in my handbag or something half there.

BB: Your make-up. You've got Dave who's as glamorous as you can get sometimes and then you've got you - sort of aspiring to glamour but there's always that

thing that's not quite there. That's part of the character, is it?

- M: No. That's me! It's part of that 'I couldn't really be bothered thing and also I'm sloppy about make-up. I always do it at the last minute. It's not essential to me. I'm not vain, you know!
- BB: So there really is a blending. It's not like Hinge and Brackett, for instance, where there are completely different personas. You're not actually being 'Countess Malitza' who is completely different from you, like an actor might or like an impersonator might. You're not impersonating anyone.
- M: No. I'm being the middle-aged woman part of myself. And expressing that femininity which is inside me on stage. A lot of drag queens do the opposite. They seem to express their masculinity through the frock, through the drag. They tend to become very aggressive. I don't.
- BB: That's one thing I was intending to move on to - the view that drag is somehow the expression of the phallic nature of the male performer in female gear. The idea that once they're in a dress they can get as aggressive, as assertive, as rude and as antagonistic as they wish.
- M: They get away with it because of that's the way Society seems to work.....
- BB: Yes. And then, of course, you have the criticism that drag is misogynistic and woman-hating. Your drag and Dave's is of a different quality.
- M: I like to think of it as being a gentle, kind sort of drag. I don't feel I'm sending women up. I wear what I feel a woman of my age and figure would wear. I'm just about to chuck so much of my wardrobe out, actually. I'm not parodying women. I'm expressing my femininity. I'm quite happy as a man. I don't have problems expressing masculinity therefore I don't have problems expressing femininity.
- BB: The feminine and masculine side are actually both blended together in your performance. For instance, to get specific - your make up. Through the make-up one can usually see that you've got your beard shadow on your face. You haven't bothered to conceal it as maybe someone like RuPaul might do. It appears as if you've done it in a hurry, perhaps.
- M: Yes, that's me! I found I spend about two and half minutes doing my make-up. I think, 'Now, what would I do if I was Malitza going shopping'. That's my attitude. It's not that I don't think that audience deserve me to look 'perfect'. It's that I think it would be wrong if I did.
- BB: Dave said to me that you decided to drop the Countess bit because it became a bit like Hinge and Brackett working with an Essex Girl.

- M: It did. The voice was very unnatural. It wasn't me, basically. I sometimes do talk like that in the daytime. So sometimes that still comes through.
- BB: So, are you saying that that kind of high voice, which some people may call a mocking parody of a woman's voice as used by Pantomime Dames sometimes, comes into your voice as Malitza because it comes into your voice as Michael at any point in the day?
- M: As I feel. Yes. We work as we feel.
- BB: So now you're not the Countess.
- M: No. I dropped it gradually.
- BB: So did you train as a singer or what? What was your background?
- M: Very strange training, actually. When I was at college I trained as an alto. Then I trained as a tenor. Years later, I trained as a bass.
- BB: Is there anything in your thought that when you're doing Malitza you are 'being' a woman? Or that you're performing as a woman? For instance, in the case of Dr. Evadne Hinge, there's is no question of it - what George is doing is 'being' this little old lady and you have to know George Logan well, to see any traces of George Logan in his performance of Dr. Hinge. I mean, I know a lady who actually thought Patrick and George were really these two ladies. Hinge and Brackett to her were not performed by men until I pointed it out to her and she took a lot of convincing. She had to see them about a dozen times before she woke up to the idea that they were guys.
- M: That's a complete portrayal, isn't it? I'm not doing that. Yet, in a sense, I have a pretence of being a woman of that age. You know I'd pretend to be shocked at some of the rude bits and come out with words that I would not normally come out with. I react as, perhaps, my mother would. But I find that I do that a lot, anyway.
- BB: But how much of that is just Michael?
- M: Well, as I said, they interweave.
- BB: But when the audience come in they know you're not portraying a woman in the same way as Patrick and George are.
- M: At the beginning they thought I was. But it's only recently that I've found my style. You know, it's like finding yourself. And strangely enough these are the trousers I actually wear on stage. Because I've suddenly discovered women's trousers and I'm so happy! I think they are wonderful for daily wear. So I arrive wearing these women's trousers and put my make-up on.

- BB: You find women's trousers more comfortable or what? I mean, you're wearing them now as Michael.
- M: Yes.
- BB: So you're not actually wearing women's clothes because you're deliberately cross-dressing as a woman?
- M: In a funny sort of way I don't cross-dress, at all. At least, I don't consider myself as cross-dressing. I mean, this top I'm wearing now could easily be something I may throw on. Am I cross-dressing now? I don't think so. I'm merely wearing these clothes and they happen to be women's trousers and - look at my feet, I mean...I'd put on the make-up and the wig, perhaps, for the show but I'm not really cross-dressing as such.
- BB: This leads nicely into what I wanted to talk about with regard to the relationship between drag and cross-dressing - or not cross-dressing. There are an increasing number of Queer women performers who dress up as a glam stereotype or drag icon stereotype of women and they claim to be performing drag. They're not cross-dressing in men's clothes, do you see what I mean?
- M: Hmm.
- BB: For instance, there's a couple of performers, a lesbian and a gay man who perform together. For one of their shows, they both wear identical Show Girl outfits, glam make-up, glitter, feathers, the lot. Now, they bill themselves as a male and female drag act. She claims that he is obviously a guy dragged up but that she, though she is female is doing the exact same thing and, therefore, is performing drag. Whether she is a woman or not is beside the point.
- M: Well, I don't think she's really doing drag.
- BB: Well, she's not cross-dressing but it is arguable that she is doing drag.
- M: What she's doing is extending what women performers in entertainment do anyway. But I would argue that it is not really drag.
- BB: Well, she's adopting the performance nature of drag. For instance, she is over-the-top, she presents images from the vaudeville tradition, she may lip-sync, for instance. She may say in her argument that men performers heighten the glamour, extend the stereotype, emphasize the grotesque aspects, perhaps, and that is exactly what she is doing but because she is a woman people would not accept it as drag because drag seems to have been synonymous with cross-dressing. It's been recognized as Cartoon, Parody, Burlesque, etc. but not drag.
- M: Well, 'burlesque' is a better word for what you're describing. From the time of

Shakespeare really 'dragging up' has always been taking on the guise of the opposite gender. More for men than for women.

BB: What seems to be happening is extending or pushing the definition of drag further. I find that interesting.

M: Women are in drag most of the time. They wear trousers and suits all the time now anyway.

BB: Jeans, jumpers, shirts. Unless women wear moustaches or beards like in Dianne Storr's Drag Kings Workshops cross-dressing doesn't come into it in the same way as a man wearing as dress. And if they wear moustaches or beards etc. then they're almost impersonating male stereotypes.

M: In a sense, I have my own little private joke by wearing women's trousers all day.

BB: How's that?

M: Well, going out in women's trousers. Women wearing men's trousers..... I'm wearing women's trousers!

BB: And, actually, I suppose, it's Unisex trousers. Moving on to your songs, Michael. Presumably, you've written them all yourself.

M: Yes.

BB: And do you rehearse a lot?

M: Well, we do meet sometimes but because of the distance involved and the fact that both Dave and I live varied lives. But we actually want to start to rehearse regularly because there's so much we want to do, so many new songs. There's no rehearsed order of things in the show. We'll probably call out spontaneously which song to do next, that sort of thing.

BB: Talking about the songs that you do on your own...

M: I've written all those myself. I wait for the inspiration. A lot of them have their own history, for whatever reason. They often mirror experiences. There's one or two words from 'Cowgirl' where I do say that one night David fucked off with someone, which was all true. And at six o'clock one morning I started writing about how angry I was then. I actually worked through the therapy side of it. I was feeling really, I don't know, hurt.....it was a lot of old stuff coming out as well. And then, there we had the song! Pain is creative if you know how to use it. Experience is creative. Or maybe a tune will come to me like with 'The Boy of Brighton' which is 'The Girl from Ipanema', of course. One day I just couldn't get that tune out of my head and I started to play and the words just

started popping out. There's one verse that made me laugh so much on the stage that I really started screaming with tears. It just happens like that sometimes, things just pop out in spite of yourself.

BB: The jokes within your songs, you sort of do a lot of what I would call 'light blue' stuff, innuendos etc.

M: Yes, where a word rhymes, you mean, and I use a completely unrhyming word which takes the place of the rude one which does rhyme? Yes, I do that a lot and, also, now I've started mouthing the word and letting audience actually sing it aloud by themselves.

BB: Why do you do that?

M: I want the audience to think it. It came about by listening to Max Miller. He used to say, 'It was clean when it left me'. He believed that if you get the audience to do the thinking it was much better. It can be quite offensive if you say something yourself. Sometimes I love to be offensive but not always.

BB: There's a bit in a song that you do with Dave in which there's the line, 'I fucked him!' and Dave does this thing where he goes, 'I'm not going to say that. I'm not going to say that.' And then you bellow 'Fucked him!' Where does that kind of double-play come from? Did it just happen once and you kept it in or did you decide that's what you were going to do?

M: It just happened.

BB: You don't plan anything, then, on a daily basis?

M: No. We don't plan at all. We both work inspirationally or intuitively or whatever. We are constantly working on the moment things happen. Obviously, we repeat things but those things once happened intuitively at some previous moment and they worked and we did them again and they would have become part of our repertoire, if you like. So everything's got a history but - no, we don't plan any particular performance, no.

BB: And this way of working intuitively, spontaneously, in the moment, could be seen as a form of cabaret clowning.

M: Yes. You've sort of got your techniques and your material and you play it all as and when in a free spirit, really. If you find a thing works you keep it in. With the audiences sometimes we do things where they can become involved without having to use any intellect. If they are drinking, or half-drunk or drugged, you need to give to those who are listening but also not overload on the others. Dave has a remarkable gift for that kind of chatter. He has a gift of being himself with the chat. He talks to them as if he's known them all forever. He shares things with them.

- BB: And at that point the wig and the dress etc. become almost irrelevant.
- M: In a sense, the wig and the dress are irrelevant. Except that it's a presentation of a sparkle of entertainment and a sparkle of.. 'We have dressed up to perform for you' kind of thing. It's like scenery but it's not the action.
- BB: Coming back to the play between the two of you on stage, how much is led by you and how much by Dave?
- M: Very little led by me, I would think. Except occasionally, I might. I am an accompanist and always have been. But we have to do something somewhere. I can't just be a piece of wood accompanying someone.
- BB: Coming to your stories or long jokes about cottaging and sexual things like that, when you tell them...
- M: I don't tell them actually.
- BB: Oh, but you've done that once or twice.
- M: Have I?
- BB: When I've seen you do a show on your own.
- M: Oh, you've actually watched me on my own?
- BB: Yes. When Dave hasn't been around, when Dave has got the car stuck somewhere or for some reason he hasn't been there and we've had Malitza on your own and you have on those occasions done jokes and things. Not an awful lot but you have. But the point I'm getting round to make is that some of your stories and songs as well, for that matter, the sexual jokes within them, they can be interpreted by the audience as being told by Malitza, a middle-aged looking woman with a bit of coyness and some bravado, or they can be interpreted as being told by a gay man, whom we all know is performing as Malitza. Is this apparent ambiguity intentional? Or is it just whatever the audience would like to make of it?
- M: It's almost like everything I say has no sexual overtones, there's no sex vibe in what I do.
- BB: The sex vibe may not be there but certainly the images are...
- M: Oh, yes, but it's almost like a description rather than an experience.
- BB: For instance in one of your songs which you sing to the tune of 'Poor Wandering One', the line 'I came in a taxi tonight!' doesn't merely refer to you arriving in a taxi, surely? The sexual reference is clear, isn't it?

- M: Ah, you see! Max Miller. It was clean when it left me! I really say things that I think are funny. I think sex is very funny. I think the whole idea of cottaging is funny. I've seen orgies and they've reminded me of when I was in school and little children played with each other. I mean, when people say it's disgusting, I just think it's hysterical!
- BB: Well, that all does serve then to undermine or parody the whole serious intensity of sex which we sometimes find exists in the world.
- M: I suppose it's the guilt. I'm actually laughing at the guilt about it. And society's guilt about sex and sexuality.
- BB: Do you take your cues from the audience?
- M: You feel certain things from the audience, yes. During the first few numbers you kind of work out if it's going to be an easy night or a battle. If they are attentive, if they're drunk you know in the first few minutes. It's like when you first meet somebody and get those first impressions. So we both know or seem to know. I trust Dave's intuition. If he thinks an audience won't, you know, respond or give me a tough time then he lets me know this somehow within the patter. I'm getting a lot tougher now with working. I was very gentle when I first started. I learnt to whack things out which was a shock.
- BB: But do you enjoy that?
- M: I prefer working in a theatre to be honest. You can do much more subtle things and float them out very softly and that's where you can get some lovely light and shade which you can't in a bar.
- BB: Is that because the audience is in a very structured situation?
- M: Well, you have their full attention and with the lights down and everything you can get to feel more intimate with less to distract you and the audience. That's the difference.
- BB: Your show 'Treading the Boards', which I regret I haven't seen, what kind of theatre was it in?
- M: It was on a stage and audience were below us.
- BB: And that has a distancing from the audience to some degree.
- M: One of the important things for us was that we wanted to see if the show would bridge that distance.
- BB: And do you think it did?

- M: Yes, I think it did it wonderfully. That's what was so thrilling about it. It had a direction. We tried it two years ago when we did sketches and things.
- BB: You do little sketches in your club shows. The whole 'Oliver' show with Dave and you and Maisie which includes sketches, songs and dialogue from 'Oliver'. With that show I was really interested in how the three of you went in and out of various characters almost imperceptibly. I mean, now you're Malitza playing a certain song, then you're Oliver or whoever and then Maisie is Fagin and then someone else is Oliver and then Dave is Dave and then Oliver. You're all going in and out without any real warnings or signals. Is that degree of flexibility something that just happens spontaneously in your work or did you have to sit down and work at it.
- M: Oh, no it happens on the hoof. Dave will say something like 'Here I'm going to do so and so' and you're left with doing whatever is there to be done sort of thing. The reactions are genuine. They couldn't possibly be rehearsed! We just flip in and out. Like I said we work in whatever mood we're in and with our intuitions.
- BB: Yes. Flipping in and out is exactly what you do, isn't it? It's different, firstly, from 'The Divine Feud', Chris Green and Cathy Peace, who are much more structured and co-ordinated, who have more of a scenario which they've worked and who go off and change their costumes which are quite strictly thought out and sometimes co-ordinated. It is also different, secondly, from Jimmy Trollette and Lee Paris who are not necessarily flipping in and out, even though they are very flexible but they don't do sketches or take-offs from musicals or adapted characters and they don't often tell stories, though they do tell jokes sometimes. Would you say that this 'flipping in and out' aspect is basically one of the ways in which you and Dave work best or would you be happier if someone gave you a script?
- M: Oh, no. I couldn't do that. I absolutely like the excitement. It could be hit or miss. It tends not to miss, for some peculiar reason, though occasionally we have had bad times. But we have the joy of just changing things on spec. We're not stuck to anything. But we have little routines. We have a section where Dave and I do impressions. One night he came in and did 'My Old Man'. I knew nothing about this and he said, 'I'll do it Elvis Presley' and totally unrehearsed we did it off the top of our heads.
- BB: And you agreed that on the stage or in the dressing room?
- M: No. Not even in the dressing room.
- BB: What happens in the dressing room? Do you sort of prepare much or what?
- M: It's usually 'What shall we open with?' and that's it! Once we've decided that then we say what we might sing or do. But it's very much what we might fancy

doing or something we haven't done for ages and feel like. It's all in the mood, really.

BB: There's no getting into character or anything?

M: Oh, no. We arrive in character. It's a part of me. You see, I'm in my own private fantasy of being an Opera singer of sorts.

BB: If someone asked you what's the difference between what you do as Malitza and what an actor would do as a Dame in a pantomime, what would the answer be?

M: It's a straight answer, actually. What an actor does as a Dame in pantomime is to exaggerate a cartoon that is absurd. What I do is not exaggeration. A Dame in a pantomime is what the actor is paid to do as a job and it has very little to do with him. Malitza is my own private fantasy and part of me, in a sense.

BB: I have noticed throughout this interview, your voice, your mannerisms, your laugh, your gestures, there is so much Malitza there that you could just go into a song and you would be Malitza but without the make-up and hat.

M: Yes, there's so much of me in it. I'm so comfortable on stage. I'm not acting a part. I don't 'become' anything.

BB: There's one more part I'd like to touch on. The use of 'he' and 'she' in your performances. I mean, there's Dave Lynn, he's a bloke in frock and he's known and referred to as Dave. He doesn't have a female name like Millie, Lola, Maisie or Adrella do. You are a man in a frock but you are Malitza, who is a female character with a female name. Now, at different times you refer to each other as 'he' or 'she' interchangeably. Sometimes, you refer to members of the audience as 'she' when it's a man and then as you continue to speak to or about them you or Dave will revert back and use 'he'. It just becomes a confusion. Are they 'he's or are they 'she's and everyone knows that you're all males so why do it? What's behind all that?

M: I've no idea. I suppose, on the gay scene it's an old queeny way of referring to each other.

BB: But then one would refer to people as 'she' almost all the time, especially if they're on the stage. Dockyard Doris is always 'she' and so is Maisie!

M: Yes, but Maisie calls me 'Michael' on stage, you see. Or does she?

BB: You see, some artist and performers would keep 'she' all the time while they're performing. Adrella is always 'she', Lily is always 'Lily'. Jimmy and Lee while they call themselves Jimmy and Lee call each other 'she' almost always possibly because they're in drag all the time. You and Dave don't do that. Is it because you haven't actually thought about it, is it that you don't actually care one way

or the other or is it intentional to play around like that because it's in keeping with the way you both play around within your performances?

- M: Well, for a start I don't like to be called 'he' when I'm Malitza. I think 'woman' because Malitza is a woman. I think 'feminine' because Malitza is feminine. I think Dave is very much 'he' on stage. 'Him' in a frock. Never really a 'she' though sometimes the queeny 'she' will pop out of my mouth within a joke or line or something like that. Members of the audience - well, if it's a queen we're more likely to say 'she', if it's possibly a straight man we will say 'he' but, on the other hand, if we're fooling around with him we might send it all up by saying 'she'. We have been known to call lesbians 'he'.
- BB: There may not be an easy answer to this question. I just wanted to air it. Cathy and Chris in 'The Divine Feud' do this as well. They play around with it all. I mean, it's categories being played with actively like objects. For instance I noticed just now, you said 'If it's a queen' when you were talking about members of the audience. That's it, isn't it? It's all 'it' after a certain point. In your 'Oliver' show which you did with Maisie one night, Maisie was playing Fagin for a brief minute and within the one sentence Dave had referred to her as 'she' 'he' and an 'old Jewish queen' which is male category, essentially, all within one breath.
- M: Well, all that was true at that moment and at the same time. Maisie/Fagin was all those things: 'he', 'she' and 'an old Jewish queen' all at the same time.
- BB: Yes, it's a bit like the old Rosalind thing in 'As You Like It' where if Rosalind was played by a man you have the actor (male) playing Rosalind (a woman) who drags up as a man. The man performing Maisie (the drag queen) playing Fagin (the man).
- M: A bit 'Der Rosenkavelier'.
- BB: Yes. A male playing a female character where that female character dresses up as male.
- M: You have to carry the femininity as well as the masculinity together. Maisie causes more confusion about all this than anyone else. I think she's confused herself.
- BB: I wonder if the confusion is a good thing because what that is saying is that throughout this kind of drag performance the genders are up for juggling with as much as any thing else.
- M: Yes, it's all part of the clowning. I think, if we had a discipline on that it would be ridiculous. Anything that takes away that kind of spontaneity would be awful. Nothing is absolute. We're not men impersonating women, you see. We get away with an awful lot. We could structure it all but we don't work like that it

would restrict us. In a sense our audiences are witnessing something that's on-going. We actually start the stuff in the dressing room and bring it on the stage with us. We don't start on the stage. We arrive on stage already in it. As soon as we're dressed we're into what we're doing. The only difference is that once we're on stage we are delivering to a lot more people than we were when we were in the dressing room. A lot of the show is about our relationship with each other, what goes on between us, the banter, the repartee.

BB: Now you're doing your 'Treading the Boards' theatre performance you're not going to stop doing your cabaret shows in the bars, are you?

M: No, no. But there are likely to be changes. I'm not sure what yet but there will be some changes. I always say, 'Don't worry about anything. What we do will come to us.'

**INTERVIEW 4 Chris Green (Tina C) (April 1996)**

BB: How did you get the idea of Tina C?

CG: Well, because I like country music and it was one of those showbiz stories which was when I was working with Robert Pacitti on 'Geek' and I was meeting him for rehearsal and I was walking to Warren Street with my Walkman on listening to Winona Judd who is half of Tina's parentage -certainly wig-wise- and I thought I should invent a country music drag queen and when I met Robert I told him I was going to invent this drag Queen and he said, 'Oh, and I expect you're going to call her Tina C.' And that was it. That was the start.

BB: So the word play on Tennessee was there right from the beginning.

CG: Yes, absolutely. It came from Robert.

BB: So, what's your background, then?

CG: I did a Drama and English degree at Goldsmith's and finished there and decided not to be a performer. I started working in TV by default, really. I became a researcher and worked as a researcher for youth programmes for London until the middle of '94. I was not very happy doing what I was - working for things like 'The Word' and 'Naked City', that kind of youth trash entertainment. I had been a bit dissatisfied with it and I had a long time off and went to America. I came back started looking for work, answered Robert's ad for 'Geek' and I was faced with this decision - do I want to perform, do I want to work for TV and I missed the sort of stuff I did at College.

BB: So why a drag queen?

CG: I don't know. Going back a bit - while I was working in telly. Cathy (Peace) and I had always talked about the idea of starting something together and we sort of focused on the Ridiculous Theatre Co. in New York. And at one point we were going to do their Egyptian farce thing and it was that and Blooplips we both really liked. And so that had always been in my mind that if I was going to perform I'd do that kind of thing. And doing 'Geek' there was a bit where we were talking of doing drag and I ended up taking the character called Crystal Palace and making her into a trashy drag character.

BB: In the work in 'The Divine Feud' I can see elements of Blooplips and Ridiculous Theatre Co. in it but the work you do for Tina C is on a different level. You have a character called Tina C and you have a fictional biography of her, her life, her background etc. How do you go about doing that?

CG: What, the Tina process?

BB: Yes.

- CG: Well, the two lots of work I do are very, very different. Tina's much more in the guise of Dame Edna, really, and Lily Savage, I suppose, but not quite to that extent, because I'm never quite sure how much Lily Savage is Paul O'Grady. But there is this thing of there being a person whose biography you're playing on. And a monstrous person as well.
- BB: Do you script it quite a lot?
- CG: Mm. I do but it evolves all the time and alongside the evolving of the character is the gaining, for me, of performing skills in the various idioms. I've never done any cabaret, I've never done any that sort of working off an audience. So how I work involves all those kinds of performance skills. And I realize that I do overscript and, nowadays, I think I can much, much more move away from the script.
- BB: At the performance I saw at The Two Brewers there were those people who had come in during the show, stood at the back and started verbally responding to you in a way the rest of the audience had not done before and from that point something different started to happen. It seemed like it was the first opportunity that night for you to start playing with the audience in that way. Do you find that scripting limits that possibility for you or would you rather script less?
- CG: The problem I have, I think, at the moment is that opening five minutes. That's what I'm focussing on at the moment. What do you do for those opening five minutes when everyone's sitting there going 'God!', you know, and they're not personally drawn in and I, think, the opening stuff I've got at the moment is character exposition. It's like - 'This is who I am Blah, blah, blah' and maybe what I should be doing is, 'This is who I am' in about half a sentence and then, 'You pay attention!' in the other half of the sentence. Going there and back all the time.
- BB: Does any of Tina C's life experiences or circumstances match up with yours?
- CG: Horribly! The love of country! But, yeah, I really do filter my own experiences through and also because all the songs are mine - well, most of the songs are mine. And, inevitably, those end up being my sort of thoughts etc.etc.
- BB: I wondered if there were any circumstantial similarities between Tina C's background and yours.
- CG: No. Not really. The only thing, I suppose, is that I can't bring myself to make Tina religious. She probably would be. You see, I have a very strong allegiance to what I see as being faithful to these characters, based upon the fact that I know quite a bit about five women of whom Tina is an amalgamation - so, I think, that she probably would be religious. She would be the kind of woman who would hang God on her album sleeve and thank all the women who made the tea - that sort of thing. But I really cannot bear to make her religious

because I grew up in a very evangelical household and having moved on from all of that I really cannot bear to make her evangelical which is quite interesting because it would be the ideal opportunity to take the piss out of all those kinds of things. But that's the only way that I'm aware that I'm influencing the character to any great extent. I'm aware that I could really, really hate her and I think I don't want to dislike her that much.

BB: And is she also an amalgamation of various country music that you like? I mean - 'the girl who put the cunt in country music' - Now, how do you get away with that?

CG: I don't know. Because Tina would never say that!

BB: But you would say that, as Chris Green or maybe you wouldn't - I don't know. But how do you get away with that?

CG: I think Tina does get away with it because I think is the essence of her character is that she is an entertainer. I had all this stuff that she had this manager who was homosexual and she's still not very well known and he books her into all these places that are a bit odd and a bit strange but she's an entertainer so she sings saucy songs and she tells rude jokes if that's what's needed and if she was playing at the Royal Variety Performance she'd be there singing 'Stand by Your Man' or a classic song because she is an entertainer. So somewhere in my head I think Tina would get away with the line 'girl who put the cunt into country music' without - not without understanding because she would understand what it meant - but without the fear of pissing people off.

BB: Her agenda isn't just to entertain though, is it? There is this sense of 'Stand by Your Man' but also of 'Chop their balls off', isn't there?

CG: Oh, yes. She's a very ballsy sort of woman, yeah.

BB: So her agenda is to entertain and what else?

CG: She's incredibly didactic. She comments on the world as she sees it, as a post-feminist country icon. I think Tina is a big feminist. And that I suppose is probably another way it relates to me because when I was at college I was involved in that feminist framework and I looked at all that stuff. But, yes, she's moved on from that. She's tough because that's also the essence of country music. It's about surviving, about being tough and if you're a woman you have to be like that. And if you're a man you can get away with it more.

BB: And what do you, Chris Green, get away with, then? What are the risks you're taking, if any, in the performances of Tina?

CG: Personally? I've written hundreds and hundreds of songs and never sung any of them to anyone, except, you know, to friends. So I can distance myself

somewhat. I'm taking the piss in a way and if anyone says, 'Ooooh, isn't that dreadful!' I go, 'I know it is!'. So that's one thing that I get away with. I think that's why with the stuff that I do on my own, the invention of the character is the perfect 'get out' not that I would articulate it that boldly, but the character does let me get away with things that I would never get away with otherwise. Or maybe never.

BB: Is there anything that you as a performer are drawing to people's attention in your performances? Is there an underlying intention as it were apart from the performing, the entertainment and the 'fun of being Tina'?

CG: The big one - and I'm just starting to realize this is - celebrity, the deconstruction of celebrity. It always annoys me that the idea that just because someone is famous they can comment about anything at all and people are fascinated and people will love you and some people will neglect their children and wish to become Big Stars. I think it's a strange system and Tina's a great way of looking at all that and as Tina gets more famous and known I see her and feel her getting broader and broader. A bit like Dame Edna who was a Missus and then became a Dame and is now a Megastar.

BB: I see Dame Edna using her performances to subtly and sometimes not so subtly expose people's hypocrisies, amongst other things, in an outrageous and light-hearted manner. Could Tina end up doing that kind of thing?

CG: Well, to some extent she's already doing this - by showing how stupid people are and can be for believing in Big Stars. They always have a get out. You know 'Everything is not my fault'. She abuses her power and I love that bit where she says, 'People say I'm abusing my power, do you think that I do! I don't think that I do!' - and she knows perfectly well that she is and that whole idea that she is doing a kind of chat show and she can just come on and be horrible to everyone. Yes, I think she will develop along those lines. But you have to deal with it very, very carefully. Like at one show, in Edinburgh, there was this man there and he was a gift really. He took a photo of me - of Tina - right in the beginning of the first half and I just sort of laid into him and he had a woman's handbag and looked very odd and he had an anorak on and he looked like the perfect person to take the piss out of and I did for ages and it was really funny and I think it was getting a little bit too far. I suddenly started reverting to being Chris and feeling strange about it rather than being Tina being nasty because he was interrupting her show.

**INTERVIEW 5 Cathy Peace and Chris Green (The Divine Feud) (May 1996)**

CG: I think Queer was supposed to be a lot of things that it never really delivered. When I think of 'Queer'. I think of Freedom.

CP: Chic...

CG: Yeah. Queer young things, if you like. And it ends up being an exclusive thing not an inclusive thing at all. And, in a sense, it becomes run by gay men.

BB: I want you to explain a little more of that.

CG: Queer becomes fashion based, more 'life-style' based, it becomes 'cool' places to go, it doesn't become 'everybody can do what they want' and we're all bound by being transgressive, which is my understanding of the word. It becomes -

CP: Like you have to 'wear the clothes' and have the money, basically....

CG: Which is a real shame because I think that 'Queer' is a really good idea.

BB: Why? What's good about it?

CG: Because essentially it is an inclusive term. And any movement and group of people has to re-invent what they're about in every generation.

CP: And it's also re-inventing it beyond gender lines. Aside from the transsexual and transgender thing it's also about lesbians and gay men being 'queer'. But, as you say, it's been removed from that whole idea...

BB: Are you saying that the consumerization of the notion has degraded the term in some sense?

CG: Yeah but I'm not sure if you can distinguish it, really. The consumerization of Queerness has become what a lot of it is about now. It's when 'Queer' became a life-style rather than an attitude. That's a bit of a sound-bite and I'm not sure I really mean that...

BB: Is it also basically a notion for academics to deal with?

CP: Also, basically, it's a way of short-handing 'lesbian-gay-transgender' whatever for academics to be able to describe things.

BB: Some of the performers and artists who would describe themselves as 'Queer performers' are transgendered people - like Kate Bornstein, for instance. The notion of 'Queerness' extends to 'Queer Gender', 'Queer Nation', 'Queer Space', 'Queer Theatre' being 'Third Space' - not 'gay', not 'lesbian', not 'bisexual', not 'straight' - not any of those particular specific labellings - and in

so doing invites the inclusion of all 'freaks', as it were.

CP: Which is lovely. That impetus to 'Queer' is excellent.

CG: It removes the notion of 'single-issue' politics or 'single-issue' lifestyle.

CP: We do call ourselves 'queer' because the essence of it encompasses what we do. We are a lesbian and a gay man doing theatre work but we're not necessarily limited by being a gay man and a lesbian. I'm not an archetypal lesbian and Chris isn't an archetypal gay man.

BB: So, there's an element of searching for 'queerness' in order to reinvent ways of relating between gay men and lesbians and transgendered people that is different from the archetypes.

CP: Yeah.

BB: There is another aspect of 'Queer' used as the verb 'to queer' meaning 'to spoil'.

CG: Queering the pitch.

CP: Yeah.

BB: Which contains the notion that Queer performers should be spoiling something. Would you see that as part of what you're doing? Or are you at the same time celebrating something?

CP: Well, It depends. Things like 'Dumpy Dyke' and 'E Boy' is part of deconstructing traditional gay images. Saying let's take them out and have a look at them and then comment on them -...

BB: Make a critique?

CP: Yeah, saying - is that such an ace lifestyle? Is that such an ace position to be in? A lot of the stuff we've done around drag - particularly the Seventies section we do in 'Plush' with the drag queen and then the stripper which was very much looking at the misogyny of gay men at that time, of that aspect of drag.

CG: I think deconstructing is an interesting concept and process but I'm not sure how much we do that. We put people and images on the stage and we invite criticism of people and in that sense, we invite the audience to... allow the audience to deconstruct them. We don't say within the performance itself 'We want you to dislike them' or 'We don't approve of them'.

CP: We're not offering an analysis of it. We're offering it as a performance. 'If I only had a dick' is a case in point. It's very ambiguous what we're saying in

that. We know where we're coming from on that but it has elicited very different responses from very different audiences.

BB: Presenting analysis within the performance isn't necessary. What's happening is that it's happening via the process of the performance.

CG: With the Seventies drag queen in the show, we didn't feel the need to have any kind of response...

CP: Or the AIDS song...

CG: A lot of people misinterpreted that and would say, 'God, that's really beautiful' or 'That's really tragic' when it's really meant to be taking the piss out of it but that ambiguity is quite good, I feel. Because it does let people take what they want from it and we didn't feel the need to stick on a little bit where you discuss it or whatever.

BB: And that ambiguity makes the questioning happen - whether it happens because someone asks you the question or whether it happens inside their heads - it is occurring.

CP: In some senses, the fact that we're a lesbian and a gay man working together invites the questioning. From the starting point of making the booking. We say we're a male and female drag act and they ask, 'Does she wear suits then?' Only yesterday I was doing this café job, full of straight men and they asked me what I was doing and I told them I was doing a bit of drag and they said, 'Well, you can't do drag you're a woman!' Our starting point is that...

CG: It's queer, anyway.

CP: When you say 'Queer' I can't help these images flash up to me of Don't Panic T-shirts saying 'Queer as Fuck' and that whole thing about Freedom with lots of gay guys and predominately straight women being 'Queer'. But that's quite far removed from the 'Father Red Cap' Pub, for instance. I don't know how many dykes or gay guys there would be defining themselves as 'Queer'.

BB: There is a difference. You can spend an hour in 'Duckie's' bar and go across the road to 'Duke's' and spent the next hour in a completely different sort of environment where there are a lot of gay men who would not define themselves as Queer. And even though there may be lesbian women there they are not behaving in the way that the lesbian women would be behaving in 'Duckie' Club

BB: I'd like to focus specifically on drag now. You call yourselves a male and female drag act yet you have already said that people see drag as cross-dressing so what's your take on drag?

- CP: I got really interested in drag, partly because I had been watching a lot of drag and there was a great deal of men taking the piss out of women and I felt there was something for me as a woman performer to do in that field and partly because of the scope that kind of performance gives you. One of the bits we do in *Plush* has a character based on that kind of drag queen.
- CG: And that's completely subversive, as I see it.
- CP: I did a lot of street theatre and clowning and cabaret within a straight context and I used to play a lot of older women characters in straight theatre and it was basically, a bit like dragging up, putting on all sorts of stuff that I'm not and, essentially, that's dragging up.
- BB: But is that any different from being an actor playing a part? How does it make it drag?
- CP: In a sense, of course, it is no different but the important thing for me is that drag has very strong roots in that kind of stereotype, grotesque, larger than life portrayals that come from clowning, burlesque, freak shows, that kind of thing. That's different from acting as such. And in some ways, drag is genderless. You may see a man doing it, usually, but it's a man taking that kind of performance strength from doing it. Obviously Chris is in cross-gender drag some of the time but not all. It's about dressing up, the heightened make-up, the false eyelashes and all that goes with that kind of blown-up, portrayal of stereotype, 'glam', show-girlie female images. I'm not being an actress when I'm doing that, I'm being more like a drag performer. I mean, French and Saunders do their male characters very well but they are terribly dull but what they do a lot of the rest of the time is drag, as far as I'm concerned. So is a lot of what was going on in *Absolutely Fabulous*, both with Saunders and Joanna Lumley - but especially with Joanna Lumley. The portrayals of those archetypal feminine roles has been traditionally linked with drag. That's what I'm interested in. Not portraying glamorous feminine roles that make me appear to be sexually available but performance in the way that men in frocks can do. They can be crude and out there. But a woman doing the same thing is challenged. I don't male impersonate. I'm not interested in that. It's dull. Dragging as a man is really merely wearing a suit and women do that anyway. Also, the performance possibilities in that are so limited.

**INTERVIEW 6 Amy Caddle (Amy Lamé) June 1996**

BB: So tell me something about your background, Amy?

AL: Well, I did my degree in French Language and Literature and Medieval Studies and I did my Senior Thesis on women writers in twelfth century Europe.

BB: So, at that time you weren't interested in performing in anyway?

AL: No, I remember when I was in sixth grade and we decided to do *Robin Hood*. You know, a 'play'. I was cast as Friar Tuck and I thought I'd try it and see what happens. Maybe I'd like it. And then they told me I had to wear a green leotard and I decided I didn't want to do it. I think I was trying to force myself to do it, to do something different and I wasn't really interested in it at all. I was never interested in drama, theatre. I was never interested in acting as such. I think a lot of that had to do with the fact that I was not interested in playing someone else on the stage. I only wanted to be myself.

BB: So when you started your performance was the ICA show the first thing you ever did?

AL: Yeah. That was the first time I'd ever been on stage. In *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*.

BB: And in that show you were presenting yourself?

AL: Oh, yeah. I was me. I wasn't a character or anything like that, you know. It wasn't originally written to be performed, really. It was written out of frustration and a sense of isolation. I was working in 'First Out' café and people used to come up to me and say, 'You should be an actress. You should be a performer' and I'd think, 'Shut up! That's the last thing I want to do!' I'd put in my application to do my MA in Medieval Studies. That's what I was prepared to do. And then, I'm not sure what happened. Someone suggested that I submit the idea of *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* to the ICA and see if they would accept it. And they did.

BB: What did the frustration and isolation involve?

AL: Basically, a feeling of ostracism from the lesbian community and I had felt for some time that I didn't belong and that I wasn't really wanted. My coming out was from reading all these books on lesbian theory, lesbian novels, this, that and the other thing, trying to get a grip on what it is like to be a lesbian. And then I thought, 'Now I'm ready to come out. I've got all this knowledge. Now I can come out and put it into practice.' And I came out. From what I had read I had thought there was this community waiting to embrace young lesbians with open arms. And it wasn't true. I, basically, fell flat on my face. I'd go to lesbian bars in New York and, you know, I'd always have loads of gay male friends and

everyone would look at me and assume that I was a fag hag.

BB: So was this mainly an image thing or your behaviour as well?

AL: It was the way I was dressed and, it was, well, people tend to judge people on first appearances. So if I showed up in pigtails and a little pink dress, and this was some years ago 4 or 5 years ago, people would react like, 'Just what is she on?' kind of thing. Especially in New York where there is the look of that particular city, that particular bar. And when I came to London it was the same thing. I would go to *Venus Rising* and some of the women would immediately react to my wearing a skirt and this was pre-'Lipstick Lesbian' - before the media corruption of lesbian imagery. This was before all that. So images of very feminine lesbians didn't abound at all. So that's why *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body* in part was written. Because I felt I identified culturally with gay men and I felt like I was a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body because there was no place for me it seemed in the lesbian world and lesbian culture at that time.

BB: What does that mean, more specifically?

AL: My mind, everything... I felt, honestly, like there was more in common between me and gay men than between me and what lesbians were supposed to be like then. I had all these gay men around me. All of my friends were gay men. Most of them when I was growing up. I don't know whether I took on their sensibilities, whether they kind of nurtured something within me but, obviously, I felt very comfortable with them. I felt like this is me.

BB: So what would you say are the differences in the sensibilities between gay men and lesbians?

AL: I think - a sense of fun and frivolity. Of course this a generalization and I'm only saying this was my experience, but a lot of the lesbians that I've met since do have that same sense of fun and frivolity which is the kind of sensibility that I look for now in anyone, regardless of their sexuality. But at that particular time it felt just like a wasteland. The show was written in 1994. It was very difficult for me. And now I think I've really moved on from that and now, the show is almost redundant. But at that time what the show was doing was celebrating the fact that there are girlie lesbians out there, that there are feminine women who love other women. And we must celebrate that. We don't have to capitulate and in order to belong to the club we don't have to shave our heads and we don't have to wear leather jackets and we don't have to adopt the urban dyke image that a lot of girls do. I know quite a few girls who have done that and felt that it's not really that image they want but they want to hang out in the dyke bars, they want to get a girlfriend, they want to do this and that so they adapt and change the way they look in order to do that. I was not prepared to do that whatsoever.

- BB: In terms of gender role images You've been mentioning shaved heads, leather jackets and the 'urban dyke' look you've also been talking about 'girlie' lesbians, pigtails and pink dresses etc. which are in stereotypical gender thinking considered to be 'feminine' gear. You've actually said 'feminine women' just now. Is it a kind of re-appropriation of traditional 'female' images for lesbians, to be able to reclaim them, be comfortable with and celebrate them?
- AL: I think that lesbians should reclaim the feminine, basically. I think there's nothing wrong with that. I think that's something to celebrate. In my life what I try to do continually is reclaim things that are feminine as my own. I think a lot of lesbians have lost that and, I think, traditionally feminine things are very important and very good. I think a lot of lesbians will have problems and say that is very anti-feminist. But I don't think it is. It's not. Some people do say, you know that that is men putting us in those roles but I think that some things come naturally to women as well and I don't think that is a bad thing and should definitely be celebrated. I don't want to be equal to a man because I don't want to play on boys' terms. I want to live on my terms. I do not want to be equal to men because that's saying that the men's ideals are something worth being equal to. I don't want to aspire to that at all. Men and women are not the same.
- BB: OK. In terms of the title of the piece *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body*, one would be tempted to ask why a gay man in a lesbian's body? Why not a lesbian wanting to get out of a stereotype or something more woman-defined? I mean, it could suggest to someone coming upon that title that there's more being dealt with here - perhaps challenging gender positions, perhaps challenging sexuality positions in a more universal sense than challenging images within the lesbian community alone.
- AL: That was how I felt. Because I identified culturally with gay men, because to me the world of gay men held much more appeal than that which was presented to me as the lesbian world. The title simply came to me when I was standing at the bar of 'First Out' café one day. I felt so fed up and so full of questions like - why was I a lesbian? Why was I born into this body? Why couldn't I have been a gay man? It would also seem so much easier. And during all this I just said, 'I feel like a gay man in a lesbian's body'.
- BB: You know, I've seen the show several times and on one of the earlier performances I noticed some lesbian women at the show and they looked very dead-pan throughout the show and afterwards they said to me that they didn't really like what you were doing and that what you were, apparently, saying things that would do lesbians no favours. One of them said, in fact, that you were saying and doing things that lesbians have been trying to get away from for years.
- AL: That is exactly the kind of attitude that I was trying to challenge. I felt sad that given the type of lesbian I am I felt that I could not speak my truth because by speaking my truth I was somehow being disloyal or made to feel as if I was

being disloyal to every other lesbian that ever existed.

- BB: This is interesting because one can take the view that lesbians' and gay men's images are themselves, inevitably, part of the existing gender role images by virtue of the fact that they are men and women, and that women taking 'anti-feminine', if you like, images and objecting to, as you say, 'girlie' images may have been, to some degree, appropriating for themselves traditionally 'male' images and eschewing stereotypic 'female' images. Merely reversing the images round and adopting 'butch' images as opposed to 'feminine' images does not mean that you are actually doing anything more than that. By appropriating the traditional images of the other gender one is still operating within the dual gender system and can one really do anything else if one is trying to challenge and resist the gender-ascribed images of the dominant culture? How would lesbians who perpetuate traditionally 'feminine' images be challenging or resisting the dominant traditional gender-ascribed images? How do you feel about these kinds of questions?
- AL: I was just trying to be myself. I was not trying to take 'girlie' images and re-appropriate them. The only thing I did by calling myself a lesbian drag Queen was take the piss out of lesbians who take on what is traditionally regarded as 'non-girlie' images as if that is to be every lesbian's acceptable truth. I was saying this is lesbian drag because I am dressing as a feminine woman which a lesbian is not supposed to do and, therefore, I was expressing my truth and being myself.
- BB: I understand that but I've also had people say to me about you, as Cathy Peace also has had people say about her, 'Why is she saying she's a drag Queen? Drag is about cross-dressing. She's not cross-dressing. So she shouldn't say she is doing drag.'
- AL: But I *was* cross-dressing in terms of the style that was acceptable to lesbian women, not in terms of gender.
- BB: So you see drag from the terms of prevalent lesbian images at the time? But you also use performance forms like lip-sync, miming, burlesque-type comedy forms that are also informed by the drag cabaret form which lesbian performers in mixed gay clubs hardly ever do.
- AL: I got such hassle for saying 'I'm a lesbian drag Queen', especially from lesbian women. They didn't seem to understand. And since I've done the show I read things about lesbian performers describing themselves as lesbian drag queens.
- BB: Cathy Peace has not described herself as a lesbian drag Queen but she has described some of her performances with Chris Green as being drag performances.
- AL: Drag also has got itself such a bad rap over the piss-taking of women and the

misogyny of the male drag performers. I personally don't have problem with it. For me the misogyny of male drag consists in the words they use not the images. It's what they say. Drag influenced me very strongly anyway. It shows in the show in the bits like where I'm making my face up on the stage as part of the show, getting into my dress, finding a dress that fits me, the underlying theme of plenty of drag queens being 'Oh, how I suffer!' and the overcoming of that kind of struggle.

BB: It is very tempting to see a metaphor in your finding a dress that fits you for the hitherto invisible 'girlie' lesbian at the time. You go to get a dress to dance in and the shop assistant keeps telling you there are no dresses to fit you...

AL: Yes. Fat girls don't exist in our shops.

BB: So you go off and make your own dress and dance in it. You say in the show 'I have MY DRESS!!' very emphatically and triumphantly. One is very tempted to see that whole section as what you're saying to lesbians as well. You know 'There are no 'girlie' lesbians in our community. So you go off and do your show about your truth and your feminine lesbian images and you, in a sense, have 'your dress' there as well. It's almost irresistible to ask if this was your intention.

AL: Oh, yes, it's all part of the 'you-tell-me-there's-no-place-for-me-and-you-make-me-invisible-but-I-will-find-my-own-truth-and-I-will-conquer' theme, of course it is.

BB: I want to turn now to your role as host of 'Duckie' Club. It's billed as a club for 'boyzie girlz and girlzie boyz'. It seems to me that you're doing a lot of playing around with images. Your weekly thing of having a theme for each night some which were directly inviting people to play around with fantasies and images: 'Come dressed as a gay woman dressed as a man' and 'Come dressed as your favourite work of art' and 'Come as a prostitute'. Where does all this come from? Why do that? Why isn't it just a club which has performance on stage?

AL: I think the buzz is that sense of frivolity, the idea that you can play around with changing yourself, albeit for five hours on a Saturday evening but you can transform yourself for that time, that sense of being able to dress up which camp is all about, what drag has been about, really. I've always been interested in dressing up, the whole kind of ritual that is attached to that. I mean, the most soothing time of the day for me is after I take a shower, putting my make-up on, doing my hair, choosing my face, ironing my clothes, preparing the image or what I will wear that day. Especially on a Saturday night it's possible to remember being a teenager pulling all the stops out to go out, you know, determined to have a really fucking good time!

BB: I suppose you could call it 'queening it'? Where you really dress up - over the top perhaps which people within a lot of other gay bars may not do - where they

almost dress-down.

AL: Like our night where the theme was 'Gay Men dressed as Lesbians'. The whole idea of that was that everybody bloody dresses the same anyway. The girls are going to come dressed in jeans and T-shirts and the boys are going to come dressed in jeans and T-shirts and all the boys could be lesbians and all the lesbians could be gay men. A lot of our themes are our kind of fun mixed with a stab at social commentary and a lot of the time they're based on in-jokes. For instance, this week we've got 'Dress Lesbian Separatist' so we'll see what happens. We get some women there who weekly dress 'lesbian separatist' who don't bat an eyelash. But that will be the joke, you know. But though it's frivolous, I think it does make people stop and think for a bit. People who come for the first time, sometimes don't really know how to take us, like, 'What the fuck's going down here?' And then maybe they catch on and see the funny side but also maybe think a bit about what underlies all this stuff. I like to think of 'Duckie' as the club for the intelligent, homosexual punter.

BB: Now a number of people don't see 'Duckie' as a gay bar because there is such a mix of people. I must confess that on one night at 'Duckie' I was cruised by two different women one of whom actually approached me and started to try and snog me...

AL: I was approached by a guy there myself...

BB: So the questions remain - is it a gay bar, is it a bi-sexual space, a mixed space, is it a Queer space, is it anybody's space at all if they want to have fun and frivolity or doesn't it really matter?

AL: Well, to me it does matter. If I had a choice it would be a club solely for gay and lesbian people. However, life is not like that really. The world is not made like that and, invariably, we are going to get people who don't identify themselves as gay or lesbian or bisexual, some of whom may not identify themselves sexually at all or with celibacy - who knows? We get people who don't know what they're 'in for' as such and show up at the door and actually have a fucking good time! And come back for more! And, also, I don't believe in grilling people on their sexuality at the door which has been done at clubs in London in the past where a certain woman who was not a 'girlie girl' by any stretch of the imagination would grill people at the door and quite meanly argue with people saying, 'Are you lesbian? You don't LOOK lesbian to me? I don't think you ARE lesbian. So I'm not going to let you into this club because this is a lesbian club'. Now there she is with a shaven head, grand leather jacket, probably describable as somewhat S/M in her image and why is it that she can say to other women that they don't look like her and because she is a lesbian that's how lesbians are and because other women don't look like her she thinks they're NOT lesbians and therefore she withholds from them the right to go into the club when there is no published dress-code either on the door or in adverts or fliers for the club in question? 'Duckie' is not about that. I would never do that. That is my dream

- to have her show up at the door at 'Duckie' and for me to turn around and say to her, 'You look TOO gay and therefore you can't come in'. I suppose it's an inclusive space

BB: This business of 'looking gay' of course, can be seen as playing right into the costumes that are already gender-defined or of challenging the costumes that are gender-defined. Can we have it both ways? I'm not so sure. I mean, the whole thing about your dressing up themes is that they encourage the audience to dress up and come to the performance in costume themselves and in so far as they do come in costume they are not only audience members of the cabaret performance that they will see later on in the evening, they are to some extent performers in the entertainment as well.

AL: Yes, of course. That's why we invite that whole participation thing from the very beginning, getting the audience to say 'Hello Duckie' to each other and all that ritualized answering back stuff like they would do in Pantomime or whatever, Music Hall, I suppose.

BB: This leads me to the other point I wanted to bring up, the space-use at the club. You have the stage area, which is raised with a curtain etc. very much theatre-like.

AL: Well, it is really a small theatre isn't it. Only it's a bar and not a theatre at all.

BB: Yes, you have the raised bit for the audience as well, at the back like a gallery - upper circle sort of thing! And you also use the toilet spaces by decorating them like part of a set with posters, pictures, pens and paper to encourage people to write on them, give them questions to respond to like on the David Bowie Theme night you had 'Ten reasons why David is a Wanker?' and 'Ten reasons to Love David' and 'Ten reasons to be afraid of David Bowie'. Now why is that? Why can't you just leave at least the toilets alone?

AL: That was my idea because so often you go to places where everything is going on in the space where it's meant to be going on and then the toilet areas are those areas that are almost like dropping out of the fantasy. Like the fantasy stops anyway when you leave the theatre or leave the bar or get to the taxi or the street but also in a lot of places it also stops because you leave the performance and go to the toilet. So we wanted one of those venues where public spaces and private spaces could be mixed up together - where the toilet is not only somewhere you go for essentially private and personal reasons but also somewhere where you can still participate in the happening while you're being private - the pens and paper hanging from the walls and ceilings invite a kind of inter-active toilet space, messages can be left, games can be played, protests can be made, whatever. A private place in some ways because you're pissing or whatever but also a public arena for whatever you may be thinking about in private. It's also a kind of inverse of an art exhibition, if you will, in a museum you wander round and see works of art but not in the toilets.

- BB: In terms of performance spaces, the traditional performance area is stretched to include the toilet areas as well. I mean, you've even done parts of performances in the toilets, haven't you?
- AL: Have I?
- BB: Oh, no, that was when you were in the States and a link-line was set up as part of the performance that night. You were answering questions from the States and talking to the audience.
- AL: Oh, yeah.
- BB: And the line was set-up in the toilet. It was wonderful to see the people's faces when they were going in there and discovering they needed to have a pee while Simon was talking to you from the WC next to where they were standing and other people coming in to look at Simon talking to you in the States - or maybe they were trying to pick people up who knows - but it was all very entertaining. So every part of the building is used at some time or the other for performance. The stage in the auditorium for the more formal performance, the audience space for the audience who are also part of the performance because of your highly participatory performances and also those people who have come in costume become elements of the performance as they walk around and other audience members look at them and interact with them. They are walking pieces of art really, in a way. Especially on your 'Come as a Work of Art' night. It all takes on the quality of an indoor carnival.
- AL: That's exactly right. A great big ball with lots of fun and frivolity, games, costumes and everybody being themselves and dressing up and having a fucking good time.
- BB: And the toilets also become one of these performance areas.
- AL: Exactly right. The thing about the toilets also is that I refuse to have them divided into men's and women's toilets. At the beginning of the club we subdivided the toilets not into men and women but 'butch' and 'femme'. So in the men's toilet the stalls were labelled 'butch', 'butch', 'butch' and the 'sit-downs' we labelled as 'femme' and in the women's toilet we labelled one 'butch' and one 'femme'. I mean, that was a game, a complete game. In one way I was trying to break down people's thinking regarding toilets for different genders and also people's ideas of genders, what are these genders and how do they identify themselves and why, when everyone is trying to do something that everyone needs to do, why segregate yourselves to have pee? If you go into one of the stalls or one of the *pissoirs* does that make you 'butch' or if you go into one of the 'sit-downs' does that make you 'femme'? What does that mean?
- BB: And traditionally in gay bars men would always go into women's toilets to gossip or to look in the mirror because a lot of gay men's bars have taken this

heterosexual thing full scale that men's toilets don't need mirrors but women's toilets do. I find it a source of constant frustration or I used to when before I used to shave my head so now I don't need mirrors anyway. One would have thought gay men had a healthy enough dose of narcissism for the managers of gay bars to put mirrors in the men's toilets.

AL: But women would never go into the men's toilets unless they were deliberately making the point that queens were in the women's toilets but usually they would just sit and wait it out.

BB: 'The Two Brewers' pub at one time had a special key to let women have if they wanted to go to the women's toilet and I remember women going to great lengths to locate the person with the key to the women's toilet rather than use the men's toilet. But maybe they were being discrete and didn't wish to deal with the possibility of finding men having sex in the men's toilet which, I guess, is understandable.

AL: In 'Duckie' they use the men's toilets and I positively encourage it. Sometimes I go into the men's anyway and one night I went in and there were all these boys standing around and I said, 'What are you all waiting for?' and they said they were waiting to have a piss and they were waiting for me to finish and leave and I asked them if they really thought I cared if they had a piss while I was there and I asked them if they thought I was going to deliberately stand about looking at them having a pee and there was some lively interaction over that while I finished washing my hands and left. I think that kind of thing is very important in a Queer club. Aren't there enough bloody things in the world that are gender-defined? Why should where we pee be gender-defined as well?

BB: Turning now to your performance *Cum Manifesto* which I have seen several times - there's a section in there when you talk to the audience about a 'Club of Outcasts'. What does that actually mean and is 'Duckie' a 'Club of Outcasts'?

AL: Well 'Duckie' grew directly out of my writing *Cum Manifesto*. That end piece in that show about 'Club of Outcasts', a place where everyone who felt isolated and had a sense of not belonging anywhere, anyone who felt invisible would come and they would feel welcome and part of somewhere where there would be other individuals who also perhaps felt isolated and invisible in the main stream world. That's always how I felt and that's what *Gay Man Trapped in Lesbian's Body* came out of, but after *Cum Manifesto*, we decided to start a club, make this space of 'Outcasts', in a sense. A place where we can all come, where we can be ourselves, where you are not being a victim but where you can celebrate your individuality but also celebrate your Queerness. A place where you can come if you're, say, a female-to-male transexual and not see yourself as a victim but somewhere where you are included.

BB: This leads me to make a connection between 'Duckie' and Kate Bornstein's

'Third space' which she describes in *Gender Outlaw* and which has this capacity to include all 'freaks' as it were in a celebratory and positive sense.

AL: Oh yeah, Kate Bornstein's written my Bible to some extent.

BB: The difference between Amy Lamé and Amy Caddle. How different are these two people? Is Amy Lamé an extension of Amy Caddle or is there a person who is Amy Caddle who is totally different from Amy Lamé? In other words, I suppose, I'm asking how big is the part you are playing as Amy Lamé?

AL: There is a difference but it's very slight. Put it this way, sometimes in the show when I get stuck or whatever Simon says to me, 'Put your Amy Caddle hat on', meaning 'think about what you're saying, be sensible, be intelligent'. Amy Lamé is more frivolous and fun-oriented. Amy Lamé is the Hostess of Duckie, she is the part of me that dresses up and has a lot of fun, plays games and is very large and public-faced. But I never say anything on stage as Amy Lamé that I don't believe in as Amy Caddle and that I don't practise in my life as Amy Caddle, so in that way, Amy Lamé is true to Amy Caddle but, of course, Amy Lamé may sometimes wear things that I don't wear in my everyday life as Amy Caddle. Increasingly, now that Duckie has become so popular and since I've been on television I find the distance becoming larger between Amy Caddle and Amy Lamé and that is a kind of protection because now I feel that I really need to keep a lot of my private life a lot more private than I have done up till now and Amy Lamé is becoming more and more the public face. I'm quite shy and a bit of a lazy bitch sometimes and not as outgoing as Amy Lamé is. And being outgoing is what people expect of me as Amy Lamé. But I'm not acting a character when I'm being Amy Lamé.

BB: You don't say things about yourself on stage as Amy Lamé that are fictional?

AL: Oh, no. That takes me back to what I was saying at the beginning of this interview about *Robin Hood* when I was young. I didn't want to be on stage acting someone I was not.

**INTERVIEW 7 Richard Byrne (Titti La Camp) June 1997**

TC: I first started three years ago when I did a night with Regina Fong and she said, 'We've got a new face on the scene. Where are all these new drag queens?' There were hardly any. Well, there is now. Over the last three years I've noticed you've got the Dame Edna Experience, Jonathan, who is brilliant. People like that who are really professional now. It's not so much putting on a frock to get a laugh or to look good. There's a real talent behind there.

BB: There's a drag performer-singer called Tina C. He does mainly Country and Western songs - 'Tina. C. from Tennessee, the girl who put the cunt in Country Music'. Have you ever seen his work?

TC: No, I haven't.

BB: He sings his own songs but he talks a lot about Tina's background etc. and uses that for knocking a whole load of things. But country music is not the kind of music that a lot of punters in gay bars would have gone along with some time ago. And there are one or two others on what I would call part of the 'Queer Cabaret' scene, not necessarily drag, like Marissa Carr. She does a thing about a woman with nine breasts and she actually wears this grotesque costume with nine attached breasts, two in front, two on her stomach, on her back etc. etc. It all seems to be a development from the days when the only entertainment in bars was drag, strippers or singers and each drag show was very similar to someone else's. I mean, a man in frock standing there lip-sync-ing to well known songs that everyone knows and then another man doing more or less the same. O.K., their individual patter might change but the substance of the shows would be very much alike.

TC: Well, as I see it, drag Queens usually observe each other and bounce off each other. They tend not to go outside that scene and see what's happening out there and bring that back into the drag scene. I have this argument with Sassy Stryker about my show. I've been doing it for a while and getting quite bored with it and feeling like I want to go down to the Comedy Store or the Show Circus and see what sort of thing is happening out there and Sassy keeps saying to me that I give the people what they want, whether it's old style or new style. I mean, Lola Lasagne probably has that attitude as well. You know, she's a good friend of Millie's's and what works for Millie may work for Lola so she may develop what Millie does in her own shows.

BB: Yes, almost down to the hair style. Millie developed that great archetypal bee-hive hair style which was brilliant and somewhat grotesque and cartoon. That hairstyle became Millie's 'thing' as it were. In fact, at one time I saw Millie doing her take-off of *Take That's* song *Relight my Fire* which she changed to *Restyle my Ria* at Central Station. To see Millie was to see this enormous beehive which eventually grew to a couple of feet high, I think. Lola Lasagne's hairstyle used to be sixties but not so grotesque but has over the time

got higher and higher and now if you put Millie as she was next to the new Lola would there be a significant difference in image? I'm not sure there would. I suppose that's alright but there does seem to be a lot of reproduction of each other's material and images going on. Now coming to you, how did you begin? What's your background?

TC: Well, at the very beginning my local pub used to be the King William up in Hampstead and they used to put on Pantos and things like that. And someone asked me to do something small in that as one of the Ugly Sisters and I did that and it was fun. I discovered that I enjoyed it and liked performing but I didn't do anything until about six months later, on Gay Pride night, they asked me if I would work a couple of numbers and that's when I first got the number together - *Feed the Birds* from *Mary Poppins* - and that went down very well. People started saying that was really sick in the bits where I bring out the chicken and throw the bones at the crowd. Someone said I should keep doing things like that. Then the *Black Cap* pub had a talent competition in the November of that year and people kept coming to me and saying that I should enter it and so I did. So I was really responding to what other people I knew were asking me to do. I'm not sure I would have got into it on my own steam, as it were. So that's how I came up with the Karen Carpenter number and I won the talent competition on that idea. And an agent said to me that if I worked some more numbers like that he would work me. And my problem came then because before that time people would say do these numbers or those numbers and I'd do it because I enjoyed it but as soon as you're getting paid for it you start thinking differently about it as 'work' in a way. I used to do things like taking the 'mickey' out of Jesus Christ with nails between my hands and things like that but once I decided that I wanted to do this for a living then I was aware that there was a line that you can't really cross over. Then I also realized that it was because of those numbers that I was getting booked. So the other numbers like the one I do where the Drunken Nun does *One Day at a time*, *Sweet Jesus* needed to be toned down. The idea was to get reactions from the audience to being spat on and having things chucked at them and things like that. So after a while of thinking about what I was actually doing I decided not to worry about it but to just be sick and my show to be an unashamedly sick show.

BB: What about your background? Did you have any training or experience in singing, acrobatics, clowning or anything like that?

TC: No, not at all. Only a bit in school, I suppose. School plays and things like that but that was when I was twelve or something very young.

BB: So the first time you ever went on in a pub was you saying, 'I can do that' and having the urge to just get on stage and do it?

TC: I had been going to the local pub for years and everyone involved there were friends of mine. I was sharing a flat at that time and my friend with whom I was

sharing was always doing things like this and he asked me if I would join him and be the other half of the Ugly Sisters in the panto. So, I thought, I'd have all my friends around me and agreed to do it. There was no other intention apart from having a gas in the Christmas Panto.

BB: You use the word 'sick' a lot. I'd like you to expand on the use of the word 'sick' in describing your work. What are the elements that go into your definition of the word 'sick'?

TC: I probably use the word 'sick' to describe my show because that's the word everyone throws at me. It's sort of been thrust on me. As I say the first number, *Feed the Birds*, the Julie Andrews number, was when I sat down and thought about what I was going to do I didn't intend it first of all to be sick. I just did what I thought I would find funny. As soon as I did that everyone began to say how sick it was, the feeding the birds lyric together with the chucking bread to the audience as if they were the birds then the taking out the fried chicken pieces and eating them and then chucking the bones at the audience while these sweet Julie Andrews lyrics were going out. And then because people started saying that it was 'sick' and also that they wanted more of it, I then thought up the Karen Carpenter number as a response to that. Sassy Stryker keeps saying he can see why I do that 'sick' number or the other 'sick' number because he thinks I like to shock people. I don't actually see that myself. I don't think I do like to shock but I do like to get a reaction and I prefer a strong reaction to a mild one. I do like to incite a reaction, whether of laughter or anger I don't really mind.

BB: I think a lot of what you do is very, very interesting in terms of the clowning and the parodying and the slap-stick that goes on in your show. Sometimes I see your show and it's absolutely awful in that it's flat or the responses of the audience or yourself are slow and cold etc. etc. and at other times it works extremely well and it's magic and people are shouting, sometimes with anger and sometimes with pure joy. You've just said you want reactions from people. Your show seems to become alive when there are people reacting strongly to it. I actually saw a show of yours at 'The Two Brewers' pub and the audience started getting restless from your Lulu number, *Boom Bang-a-Bang* and throughout the Karen Carpenter song, *I'm On The Top of the World*, up until *Feed the Birds* this small section of the audience got angrier and angrier and ended up throwing ash-trays and bones back at you furiously and shouting abuse like 'wanker' and 'fuck off'. Whatever buttons they may be you were certainly pressing some buttons with these people. You certainly seemed to be provoking anger in these people.

TC: Yeah, it does seem to take some people that way. I don't know why they would react so strongly but it gives me energy when they do. And I think everyone else goes away with something then. I don't do it to provoke anger intentionally. I would much rather people reacted as strongly but not in anger, of course.

BB: The image you present when you do *Feed the Birds* with the bird cage on your

head, the flower-boxes in your tits, the clock-work birds you set off across the stage - did you present it like that from the very first performance?

TC: Oh, no. The first time I did that I didn't have the bird-cage. I used tiny little jumpy birds that I needed to kick all over the stage to activate them. As I performed it I responded to some things from the audience like an impromptu visual gag and developed them as part of the number in the show. Yeah, the numbers grow as I do them. With *Feed the Birds* the first time I wore a plain long black dress and a grey wig, all terribly tatty. I carried a large red bag with three wind-up toy birds which I hammered on stage with a hammer. It was altogether an older person I was presenting. And then the bird-cage idea came a lot later and the flower pots in the breasts were an idea given to me by Ceri Dupree.

BB: They look as if they're structured into the dress.

TC: Yeah, they're Ceri's creations. She actually made them and gave them to me which was very good of her. But coming back to audience reactions. I travel up and down the country and get a different reaction all the time. It usually works very well in Birmingham for some reason. It can work brilliantly in one venue at one time and then at another time at the same venue it will just die a death.

BB: So what makes it work well for you?

TC: It's not so much the audience reaction. It's how I perform the show. Most of the time, if I get a really great reaction what I do then is infectious throughout the whole audience. I don't ever aim to please everyone out there. If some people don't laugh, that doesn't bother me at all. I always offend someone out there, anyway. When I first started it used to shock me. I remember doing 'The White Swan' pub and some guy came up to me afterwards and said, 'Are you planning to do that Karen Carpenter thing again?' and when I said, 'Yes' he started crying in front of me and told me that his sister had died of bulimia and I had to say quite straight, 'I certainly don't find bulimia a funny subject. I'm not aiming this at bulimia in any direct way or you or your sister. Why don't you think about why most people out there are laughing at it?'

BB: Why do you think most of the people were laughing at the Karen Carpenter performance? It *is* quite gross and so is the Olivia Newton John one.

TC: I still don't know, really. They just do. I could sit here and invent some kind of argument that might sort of explain that.. but I can't really come to a decision about that. But I always see all comedy happening at the expense of someone or something or other. And with that I just take it to an extreme. And I think people laugh at what scares them probably. Or if they become detached from it they can laugh at it. But I can't say I could tell you for sure.

BB: A lot of the laughter at your Karen Carpenter seems similar to the laughter that

greet Adrella's performances sometimes. Do you know when Adrella used to do the *Phantom of the Opera* performance with the blood-drinking and choking, coughing and spilling blood out of her dribbling mouth in that grotesque, vampirish way?

TC: Yeah.

BB: A lot of your Karen Carpenter gobbing of blood, if I may use that phrase, gets a similar kind of laughter to what Adrella gets in that performance. I wonder if you were influenced at all by Adrella's *Phantom* in building your Karen Carpenter?

TC: No, no. Not with that piece. But I can tell you with regard to Adrella. She used to do that thing with peanuts and throw them at the audience. And when I saw her back in '89 at 'The Phoenix' bar she was doing that chucking peanuts business that she does and I started chucking them back at her and I thought it was hysterical. That's where I got the idea of the bread and chicken chucking in *Feed the Birds* from. The first time I did it, it was Christmas time and *Mary Poppins* was on and all that and I wanted to change the treatment of *Feed the Birds*. And it all sorted fitted, it made sense to me. That was sort of from Adrella. And with my Olivia Newton-John blood business - I was going out with someone at the time who was very wholesome and Dave Dale always used to do his performances with blood and knives and that and I took the Olivia idea back to that by adding on the syringe that I use as Olivia. But coming back to the Karen Carpenter it wasn't from Adrella, specifically or well, it wasn't consciously, anyway.

BB: Looking at the pieces you perform - Karen Carpenter, Julie Andrews, Olivia Newton-John, the Drunken Nun - there's a whole list of people - there seems to be an enormous degree of irreverence in your performances.

TC: That's a point that probably has to do with me really. I was brought up as a Catholic. My parents are both Irish Catholics. Forced to church every Sunday, sent to special Roman Catholic school, and I was probably a very good kid growing up. I didn't ever really argue with my parents or anything like that. So I suppose in many ways the acts are part of a rebellion against my upbringing. And all this 'sickness' is a response to all that. I do agree with that.

BB: So the 'sickness' really is a combination of irreverence, rebellion, changing things that are held as almost sacred or 'holy', religiously or culturally, and a general de-bunking.

TC: Yeah, I think so.

**INTERVIEW 8 Marisa Carnesky (Carr) March 1999**

MC: I did this piece last year. I formed together a group, The Dragon Ladies - I'd been working under this name for a few years - but a bit more seriously, two years ago, I got a commission and formed together a group and got a commission for *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* which was based on a piece I did before called *Lady Muck and her Burlesque Revue*. I write. I wrote the play and performed and choreographed them and worked with this artist and musician and we brought in some dancers, anyway, was quite successful. We hired the Raymond Revue Bar and the events were all-night events. *The Grotesque Burlesque Revue* was for about forty minutes to an hour and it had three main characters. It was kind of cut-up and non-linear in style. It starts with a character called Dolly Blue. I eventually slung it round the Bluebeard story but the main ideas for the piece were around sailors, tattooed ladies, sort of around pantomime and a parade of sexuality. I had a false skin, which was a collaboration with a visual artist, which had over-large breasts and a vagina. That was her vision and I mixed that with my vision which had these characters and dances and monologues. She was an art person and I'm a theatre person. The piece started with this character Dolly Blue who was supposed to be Bluebeard's first wife. Captain Bluebeard comes to see Dolly Blue performing and falls in love with her. She marries him and goes to his boat and into his cabin. He chops off her legs and makes her into a ship's mast. And then the ship is called 'The Dolly Blue'. She weeps tears of blood into the ocean. The blood flows on to the oysters, which are kind of vagina, fish-like things. The ship crashes and the oyster flesh, tears of blood and the pearls all form into a diabolical creature who takes the skins of the tattooed sailors and makes herself a skin and stalks. I did this dance piece where I come out in a Kali style dance stalking the sailors in the streets. So the three characters are really stages - the naive, music-hall, Victoriana, bizarre show-girl who goes into the room, becomes the ship's mast, goes into the water and emerges as this monster. Also, Dolly Blue is called 'the peacock-lady'. There's a play with monsters, peacocks, tattooed bodies, images of sailors, images of women as peacocks (which relates to strippers as well), women as snakes, women as half-animal - particularly with the peacock lady. The peacock is male, so it's a parade of male sexuality through the female - an aggressive, showy, flamboyant sexuality that is made for men, for the male gaze. My Dolly Blue girl, my show-girl, flamboyant peacock lady also came, partly, from my grandma in the East End, her Jewishness, stories from my grandma who, in later life, had to have her legs cut off.

BB: Dave Lynn and Helena Goldwater also play with Jewishness because they are Jewish. I'm wondering if there is in anyway an historical relationship between Jewishness and the Gothic or the grotesque?

MC: Yes, completely. That's what my next show, *Jewess Tattooes*, is about - but let me finish telling you about the peacock lady. She rides out of the water as this monstrous, murdering avenging woman who is Violet Rose. The bouquet of flowers that Bluebeard has given her turns blue - and blue/violet roses don't

exist in nature. There is, also, the play between 'violet' and 'violent'. Then I do this monstrous Kali-esque sex dance. She's a murderess really. Bluebeard in a way murdered her and she wrecked the ship and the final stage is the street-walking-carnavalesque whore who does pearl tricks.

- BB: That's the section you did in *Duckie Club* as part of a cabaret night.
- MC: Yes. I come out in a bald wig with enormous plaits on it and I do a kind of side-show turn.
- BB: And you extract these pearl necklaces from various orifices and sling them about sometimes into the audience...
- MC: Yes. The actual story going on behind that is that I've taken the skins off the tattooed sailors and emerged as this bizarre creature and I'm taking my revenge on all the sailors. I stalk the alleyways of the docks to find sailors to remove their skins and I blind them with the golden pearls that I pull out of my vagina. So I've done lots of bits of that show at various times.
- BB: So what exactly is your role in all of this?
- MC: I write, I stage, I direct, I choreograph, I perform the shows. I work with visual artists and musicians to make these pieces. I do longer funded pieces that take months to make and then I also do cabaret 'turns' where I develop ideas in a much more raw, anarchic, unrehearsed way.
- BB: So, are the larger pieces the 'body' of the material that you return to from time to time for the more spontaneous pieces - your resource as it were?
- MC: Yeah. That was one piece. The second piece, *The Macabre Melodrama of Lottie Bone*, starts with bizarre Siamese twins. I was a bone marionette of Siamese twins who are murdered by the brothel-keeper's mad son. Beetles crawled inside them and ate them all, and the Siamese twins were stuck together and had been filled with poison. A rag-and-bone man finds them a hundred years later in a really derelict house and when he rubs this bone marionette in his hands he gets sicker and sicker. It's really all about masochism and sexuality in that he rubs this bone marionette and she is full of poison. The more he rubs her the sicker he gets till eventually she steals his soul and she comes back to life again.
- BB: The underlying themes, obviously, are grotesque - something has been invaded, oppressed; something has been destroyed. Out of that destruction there is an underground, subterranean, almost, movement in order to resurrect some kind of newness and that newness has to be transformational.
- MC: Obviously my subject matter and my mental self are coming from a mixture of my interest in sexual archetypes, women and their sexual archetypes, and women's archetypes in entertainment - the carnivalesque, side-show street-

woman or the comical whore or the vaudevillian, Mae West - Marie Lloyd music-hall character and then also the darker, more monster-woman, animal-woman. I'm looking at the difference. I've made these three ideas around the history of women in sexual entertainment - the side-show type entertainer and the erotic dances. What I've tried to do is look at traditional narratives and mix them with fairy tales, popular mythologies and these archetypes of women as sexually bizarre beings that are complex and interesting, partly grotesque and partly sexual, partly death-like, partly-male and partly-female. I'm taking narratives that are really traditional old-fashioned narratives either coming from pre-Grimm's fairy tales when fairy tales were about things like otherworldliness, menstruation and death and using the traditional narrative to do exactly the opposite - to turn it upside down. So those are the two threads of what I'm doing.

BB: Is your prime intention to tell a story or to embody certain processes, images and themes and have the narrative subordinate to that or is it to get a balance between the two?

MC: Balance the two but what I'm trying to do with the story is - when you're hooking on something like Bluebeard it works against the way that traditional stories should work. It's a narrative but it peaks and falls and changes. It doesn't end in a traditional way. The piece is not restored. In fact, chaos is opened.

BB: Queering the narrative.

MC: Right. However, I am now Marisa Carnesky Productions.

BB: So 'The Dragon Ladies' doesn't exist now.

MC: No.

BB: How does all this gel with you? What parts of the rest of your life have you brought to it?

MC: I trained as a ballet dancer from when I was very small. I trained professionally in ballet for two years. And I went to the Laban Centre and did Contemporary Dance and then I went to Brighton and did a degree. My work comes from a lot of different sources. You were asking about Judaism and theatricality. There's a strong tradition of melodrama in Yiddish culture. I've always been interested in strip-tease and was drawn into that underworld sort of place so that's obviously, informed my work. Then my research into Jewish mythology and old fairy tales. Also, my own interest in sexual politics, playing with images. Also people I've worked with - I worked with Annie Sprinkle for a while and Ron Athey. All these things kind of amalgamate.

BB: When I spoke to Cathy Peace from *The Divine Feud*, she said that when she did her shows with Chris Green she felt not so much an actress - though she was to

some extent acting - as like a drag performer. What would you say you were being in your performances - a dancer, a performance artist, an actress?

MC: I do all different shows. I'm a performance artist, I think, mainly. I'm certainly not an actress because I don't act generally. The characters that I write are coming from a very personal place. I mean they are works of fiction but the fiction comes from me, comes from a certain place. I fictionalize part of my experience and I'm not portraying something that's not from somewhere inside me. So I'm not an actress. I'm not a puppet for some one else's ideas and I don't perform funny accents etc. It's not fringe theatre. It's definitely a cross between performance art and visual theatre - performance art in that it's coming from quite a personal place inside me but also playing with extreme and subversive ideas that are transgressive from a personal place rather than an outer more general place. This is the trouble I've had getting taken seriously over the years, partly because of the strip tease element in my work. People have always simplified it and marginalized it.

BB: But it informs so much of the style and the images in your work. Looking at the images of Dolly Blue - in terms of the grotesque body, there are other parts of the body that could be stressed in the costumes, for instance, and you don't. It's the head, the mouth, the vagina and the breasts.

MC: Yes, we're looking at the sexual body. We're looking at sexual entertainment. What I'm saying is that the work is complex - it's cerebral and emotional. It's quite intellectual and yet it's really entertaining and easy to follow as well. You were asking me what I see myself as on stage and I'm saying it has elements of ballet... it has elements of all these things which is why it's difficult for people to understand where it lives because it's got text and it's got choreography and strip-tease - all these things. It's got personally led performance and fictional characters. The work is a fusion of all these things a total kind of performance. I've found it very hard over the years. It's kind of been a real big issue for me in that people say '*What do you do?*' and it's always a struggle for me because at the end of a production the people I work with come away with a big body of costumes or a big set or a sound-track and I seem to come away with a script but what I really come away with is a live show. I'm really interested in theatre as a live medium. My artistry is not just about the script I write, the staging I make or the choreography I make and the preparation before the night. It's about the energy I bring to the stage on the night and the way that I can bring transgressive ideas, the way that I can go past an idea in the way that the character within me does, play with hysteria, play with extreme emotion, play with fiction and play with personal history, play with all these things in a way that is breaking down theatrical traditions - upholding them but breaking them at the same time. Also it's about working with live energy and the reactions to that and making changes and transformations on stage in a live environment.

BB: Talk about your new show.

MC: *Jewess Tattoos*.

- BB: You mention in the scenario the phrase '*self created sexual freak*' that is like being extruded from society and accepting socially excluded taste and lifestyle, which I can see as being identifiable not only with the grotesque body but also with Queer culture.
- MC: Yes. You know it's a huge taboo for Jews to be tattooed..
- BB: So that's the transgression there.
- MC: That's what my show's about. And it's with the tattooist who is going to tattoo me live on stage. It's a kind of *The Exorcist* meets *Doctor Caligari's Cabinet* meets *The Elephant Man* meets Yiddish Melodrama. I've changed my name. I've changed it to the name of my grandmother - Carnesky. They changed Carnesky to Carr in my father's generation. It's kind of a political thing in that all the Jews tended to Westernize their names. I'm now de-Westernizing it, going back to my Eastern European name that is my real name.
- BB: So this is live performance. It is an embodiment but it also an authentic enactment in that there is a real process going on within the fictional frame. Which in a sense is so many steps down the road from Kate Bornstein's theatrical *representation* of gender reassignment surgery in *Hidden: A Gender* through Orlan, Ron Athey, Della Grace etc.
- MC: That's been going for ages - the Primitives etc..
- BB: Oh yes, but in the '70s we had people like Stuart Brinsley crucifying himself and people self-immolating within performance art but not necessarily within the context of a scripted piece. Here it's a real event within a representational frame.
- MC: This is my new thing. This is what I want to do. This is what I'm working towards - a mixture between the two. It's a mixture of a play like the Dolly Blue play with a real event, real blood, my whole body on the line in the show. While I'm being tattooed my breath will change, my emotions will change. I'll have a needle in my back and I'll be talking about my fears of being tattooed and being Jewish. The first part of the play will be totally fictional with a bizarre new character like Dolly Blue - which is the somnambulist, tattooed lady who wakes up. It's exploring all the occult, bizarre, Jewish spiritual world of blood-letting and Yiddish melodrama in a funny fictional thing about this sleep-walker. And the second part is me - Marisa - taking that more Orlan kind of place. It's bringing together two parts of my art that I've never done before.

## APPENDIX B

### AMY LAMÉ'S 'CUM MANIFESTO' (1997)

This transcript is a direct re-presentation of the original production script produced with the permission of its author/s. No changes/corrections have been made to the spelling, grammar, syntax or punctuation.

#### SHOW ORDER

1. Gay Boy Dream
2. Song: "Any Queen Will Do"
3. Cruising
4. Pornography.
5. Porn Star Condom Demo
6. Condomphobia
7. Song: "There Are Worse Things I Could Do"
8. Quiz time
9. Getting to know you (handing out condoms)
10. Homophobic Abuse Dance ( tape )
11. Pillow-munchers & Cunt-lickers of the World Unite
12. Beautiful Lips
13. Song: "The Greatest Love of All"
14. The Club of Outcasts

#### GAY BOY DREAM

Boys and girls, last night I had a dream. A dream that was so incredibly real it was almost scary...I dreamt I was a gay boy. And in my dream I went to every single cottage and cruising area in the country, starred in a porn film, shaved my balls, had a hard on ALL the time, wore a cockring, took loads of poppers, sucked 200 cocks, wanked, fucked loads of guys up the arse, and got fucked up the arse myself.

THEN I WOKE UP. And realised that my dream will never become a reality. So this show is dedicated to all you real-life fuckers, suckers and wankers out there tonight. And here's a little song I've written just for you.

Amy sings *Any Queen Will Do* which to the tune of Jason Donovan's *Any Dream Will Do*.

I closed my eyes  
drew back the curtains  
to see for certain what I thought I knew  
Yes, he was gay  
and he was cruising probably for a bruising  
Any queen will do.

He wore his coat for golden showers  
that big girl's blouse

he looks a lot like you.  
 Down on his knees  
 or bending over  
 either drunk or sober  
 Any queen will do.

A crash of drums  
 a flash of light  
 his golden coat  
 flew out of sight  
 The gay boys faded into darkness, he was left alone.

But he'll return to Clapham Common  
 maybe with his strap-on  
 Another queen will do.

I'm sure the guys will be there waiting  
 not hesitating  
 Any queen will do.

### **CRUISING**

Oh my God!!! What the FUCK am I doing on Hampstead Heath at 12:30 at night?? SOME people might get the wrong impression and think I'm here to cruise. Well it's kinda too late for that because it was, just last week that I thought if I wanted to know the in's and out's so to speak of gay men's sex lives, I had to try cruising for myself. So, in my best boy drag, looking like Harvey Fierstein on a GOOD day, I came to the Heath and I assumed THE position against a tree...and waited. I thrust my pelvis out..and waited. I stared blankly into space, and waited some more. I waved some condoms in the air and thrust my pelvis out even further. And FINALLY someone came up to me. Unfortunately he was wearing an anorak and goggles, grabbed the condoms out of my hand and ran into a nearby cluster of bushes. So, after three hours spent contorted into my special cruising stance without any offers, I realised three vital facts about cruising. Do you want to know what they are???

1. Beware of gay men wearing anoraks.
2. Dressing like Harvey Fierstein won't get you anywhere, and
3. Cruising has got to be the most ridiculous pastime I've ever participated in. It's much easier to stay in and wank to a porn film. Speaking of which...

### **PORNOGRAPHY**

OK, how many of you gay boys out there watch porn movies? Oh COME ON! I expect to see every hand raised.! You there in the back--get your hand up! Don't be shy! I bet you're the type who watches porn and has a wank with the curtains shut!

General ad-lib banter with audience.

Kris Lord, John Davenport; Jeff Stryker, Kip Noll, and Rick “Humungous” Donovan. You love them don’t you dirty bitch!. But what I want to know is... where are all the lesbian porn stars??? I mean, there’s no female equivalent to Jeff Stryker...some luscious babe with a twelve inch clit. And if there were, she would leave the world of porn films to become my girlfriend...OF COURSE! Because porn films are REAL!!! I mean, don’t all you boyz have sex like they do in “Down and Dirty in Dallas”? Isn’t everyone perfectly pecced and chiselled? Don’t we ALL cum at just the right moment EVERY time? WE never have spots, or wrinkles, or stretch marks, do we? And we all have gigantic pulsating perfect dicks and clits which don’t need to rest in between sessions. And, of course, we don’t have to use condoms. After all, you never see PORN STAR wearing a condom on. Nevertheless, I still have faith in porn industry and in humanity, that there is a porn star out there in the audience tonight who knows better and carries condoms with him all the time. ANY PORN STARS OUT THERE TONIGHT??? C'mon...you, the one who didn’t raise his hand before. OK, the first porn star to come up on stage with a condom gets this lucky bag.

(A volunteer from the audience takes the role of ‘Porn Star’ and gets onstage, Amy has a chat & question time with him...assumes he IS a porn star and the chat revolves around this belief. ie. His favourite sexual position, does he use condoms or not, how many dicks has he sucked, any advice for would-be porn stars, etc... After the chat, Porn Star helps Amy out of dress - porn music tape plays. Porn Star puts condom on Amy’s dildo.)

### **CONDOMPHOBIA**

How many of you lose your stiffy when you put a condom on? OH MY GOD you just got a hard on when I SAID the word condom! Look at that bulge! (and I don’t mean your belly, luv!) Well, darling, you’re one lucky man ’cause lots of guys go limp at the sight of a rubber. Now, I know some of you guys like big wangers. But if somebody says to you “I don’t use condoms ’cause I can’t find any big enough to fit me...” take my advice and don’t believe him. Believe it or not, I can fit every brand of condom made in this country over my head. And if his willy is bigger than my head, STAY AWAY! It’s dangerous!

I know you’re thinking “what the FUCK does a lesbian know about safer sex? How can some big loudmouthed American dyke get up on stage and tell ME what to do with my dick???” Well, honey, we dykes know a lot more than you think!! It doesn’t matter who you shag, where you shag them or what their HIV status is. Go ahead, be a slag. Just be safe. And a song for all you slags out there.

Amy sings *There Are Worse Things I Could Do*

### **QUIZ TIME /getting to know you / Homophobic abuse**

Now we’ve reached my favourite part of the show, the part where I get to delve into the audience and ask you highly personal and embarrassing questions!! OK....

1. Where is the best place to keep your condoms and lube?

- a. in the fridge b. next to the bed c. on top of the three bar fire
2. What are the best condoms for up the bum gay sex?  
a. Durex Ultra Strong b. HT Specials c. lager and lime flavoured glow in the dark condoms
3. "SUCKING IS SAFE!" Is this statement:  
a. true b. false c. It's more complicated than that
4. Which city has so called safer sex police?  
a. London b. Accrington c. New York

Round of applause for participants

Are the following statements "myth" or "reality"?

- 1) Every lesbian in South London uses dental dams.
  - 2) If he's young, blonde, beautiful and goes to G.A.Y, he's HIV negative.
  - 3) Cottaging is only for sad, old, lonely closet queens.
  - 4) Lesbian safer sex is really important.
  - 5) All mustachioed fan dancers who hang out in Earls Court are HIV-positive.
  - 6) God made Adam & Eve, not Adam & Steve (...or Amy & Eve)
- 1) The big dick three inches from your face is spewing out copious amounts of pre-cum while you are tussling with the laces of his Doc Martins.  
Do you:  
A. Forget about the boots and deep throat the beast.  
B. Lay down a copy of "Boyz" so it won't stain the carpet.  
C. Use a fruit flavoured condom.  
D. Decide that sucking is off the menu for tonight.
- 2) The risk of contracting HIV is higher if you  
A. Suck someone's dick  
B. Get your dick sucked
- \*Amy highlights that A is the answer, but affirms "If sucking wasn't safer sex, every fucking suckaholic gay boy on the face of this planet would be HIV-positive."
- 3) Your jeans are round your ankles, your finger is up his arse and he's got a tight grip on your nipples. Then he whispers romantically in your ear, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question. Do you know your HIV status?"  
Do you:  
A. Say, "What difference does it make, 'cause we're going to have safer sex anyway."  
B. Tell him it's none of his business.  
C. Give him a blow-by-blow account of your entire sexual history from age 9.  
D. Tell him your HIV status, ask for his, and then decide what to do.
- 4) If you like being rimmed and you want to make sure your arse is nice and clean first.

Do you:

- A. Wash your arse with soap and water.
- B. Douche.
- C. Polish it with Mr. Sheen.

5) There is a vaccine which can protect you from hepatitis B and this is available free to

- A. Bar men from Old Compton Street
- B. Lesbians from Stoke Newington only
- C. Everybody, but particularly gay men.

6) You and your long term boyfriend want to chuck away the condoms. Do you:

- A. Assume you're both negative and start shagging without them.
- B. Both get tested for HIV and decide when you know each others status.
- C. Keep the condoms regardless.

Are the following activities SAFE or UNSAFE?

- 1) Wanking.
- 2) Sucking
- 3) Perming your hair.
- 4) Perming someone else's hair.
- 5) Going to an Interactive Scat Workshop
- 6) Water sports. (and I don't mean snorkelling)
- 7) Fucking with a flavoured condom.
- 8) Blacking out during sex 'cause you're so pissed.
- 9) Fucking with Durex Extra Safe Condom

Amy and volunteers hand out goodies, condoms etc. while the tape plays *Getting to Know You* leading into Homophobic abuse tape and Lamé dance

### **CUNTLICKERS AND BUTTFUCKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE**

You know, when I was a little girl, my mom always told me “sticks and stones may break your bones but names will never hurt you.” How many of you were called pooker on the playground? I want to hear you say YEAH? if you're a pillowmuncher? I want to hear you say YEAH! If you're a pussybumper! The time has come for cuntlickers and buttfuckers of the world to unite!

Now. Repeat after me... (touching parts of body as they are mentioned)

I have got very beautiful lips..... I have got a very beautiful bum.... I have got very beautiful tits....I have got a very beautiful dick.... I have got a very beautiful clit.

Amy sings Whitney Houston's *The Greatest Love of All*

### **SUCKING**

When you go down on your knees, do you ever wonder how you got there in the first place? I mean, there's so many things you gay boys can get up to, why the big deal with sucking? I asked one of my gay boy mates to explain this sucking phenomena to me,

and he said there's nothing like a red hot poker down your gob, Hmmm I'll take his word for it. Yeah, sucking is sexy, but is it safe? The debate begins here.

Just think if sucking wasn't safe every fucking suckaholic gay boy on the face of the planet would be HIV positive. Yeah there are risks involved, but I think you're more likely to meet Cliff Richard driving the number 37 bus from Putney to Peckham than you are to get HIV from common everyday sucking.

Here are some handy neighbourhood cocksucking tips.

If you've got cuts and sores in your mouth, avoid cum contact.

If you've got a sore throat, avoid a potentially sticky situation by having him cum on your face instead of down your neck.

Semen is full of protein and love juice face masques have been proven to inhibit wrinkles and sagging. How do you think Joan Collins has kept her good looks far so long? So, SUCK ON!

### **CLUB OF OUTCASTS**

My friends, on this night of all nights, I want you to raise your glass and say...

I BELONG. I belong to the club of outcasts. I belong to a club whose members have been kicked and beaten....a club whose members were taunted and teased at school and chosen last for the football team. A club where membership is free because we've already paid our dues. A club with no walls but an open door...and a club without rules because we've broken them all already. It would have intimate tables where a corduroyed gay men would be looking into the eyes and holding the hand of a female to male transsexual while two really girly dykes dance to Gary Numan on an under-lit dance floor....S/M lesbians would be showing drag queens how to tie bondage knots, and indie queer boys would be chatting about breastfeeding with a lesbian mother and her gay male lover. Everyone would be welcome, regardless of HIV status.

It would be a club where being an outsider would make you an insider. Feelings of isolation and despair would be replaced by hope and celebration. It's a place where everyone believes in themselves and no one is a victim. Please join. I'd love to greet you at that open door.

**THE DRAGON LADIES' THE GROTESQUE BURLESQUE REVUE (1997)**  
**(Marisa Carr)**

**This transcript is a direct re-presentation of the original production script produced with the permission of its author.**

*(The Nightmare Chorus line opens. The curtain comes down when they finish)*  
*(Enter Dolly Blue, centre stage, like a marionette)*

Dolly Blue! Dolly Blue!  
 The proud peacock Lady, the comical whore!  
 Who is unfamiliar with the wanton Dolly Blue?  
 Like a blue china doll with short chubby fingers and wiry tangled hair,  
 She flutters her glass eyes at any passer-by,  
 All twelve of them you know protruding from her head!  
 Her make believe bones lead a childish parade.  
 My powder blue lady with fierce bleeding lips  
 Seduces you to her from the rudely lit stage.  
 See close what you want to see, feel what you paid for,  
 The comical whore!  
 Laugh whilst you writhe, your wet undergarments are curiously sore.  
 The proud peacock lady, the comical whore.

*(Voice Over by Music Hall Man)*  
 Ladies and Gentlemen! Our next artiste is a funny lady of  
 charming ditties and comical patter!  
 Her teeth are sharpened and so are her claws  
 With a fierce ruby red tongue for all to see.  
 Please put your hands together, open your hearts, your minds and  
 polish up your old china for the extraordinary Miss Dolly Blue!

*(Dolly tells the story)*  
 Every night after my show, what a lark! what a lark!  
 He was waiting there for me, backstage in my private dressing  
 room.  
 The strangest flowers that he brought, so rare and fanciful,  
 Sweet violet roses of the likes that I had never known.  
 He was terribly thick set and older I must say,  
 With a haggard funny face, blank eyes that clouded up your way.  
 His bushy beard was yet the thing that carved him in a crowd,  
 Silver grey and smoke blue,  
 Grown an awful long way down.

'Oh Bluey!' I did say, 'You're an extraordinary man'.  
 'I do the best I can,' he said, 'I do the best I can.'  
 I'm captain don't you know and I've sailed the seven seas,  
 Many rare and precious valuables belong exclusively to me,

You'll be my prize possession if you'll take my hand in yours,  
 In a marriage that will show that you're my property by law  
 And in honour of this union I'll build a ship for you,  
 A vessel of desire my love, I'll call it Dolly Blue'.

Well, what could I say? What a lark, What a lark!-  
 To marry Captain Bluebeard! What a thing! What a thing!  
 Daring, Daring, Daring little Dolly Blue!  
 By George did she come through.  
 So with a grand bouquet of violet roses,  
 A dress of rarest Indian silk,  
 A vulnerable veil of Irish lace,  
 All in the shade of buttermilk.  
 We were married docked at Dover and I swear the cliffs did moan,  
 As I took my wedding vows and set to leave my childhood home.  
 The ship was grandiose and gruesome and oh, ever so clever,  
 I'd never seen one that big, let me tell you dear, not ever!

'Whatever you do', said Bluey, as we embarked across the sea,  
 'Don't go in my private room my doll, that cabins just for me.  
 You can go anywhere on this ship my doll, anywhere you wish  
 but don't go in that room my doll, don't go in their and fish'.  
 Well I was bored see! And what's a girl like me supposed to do,  
 I ask you! Sit and knit! Bugger that!  
 What kinky secret did he keep from me? What the hell was that?  
 So I went and had a look!

*(Dolly goes into Bluebeard's chamber and dances with the Dead Wives)*  
*(Dolly running away, chase choreography culminating in her chamber, on her knees*  
*with the violet roses)*

Bloody hell! Bloody hell! What mashugana did this?  
 Horrible horror! Oh horrible day!.  
 Dead women! all cut up, all bleeding, bleeding on the floor,  
 Bloody trails up the door!  
 Some have arms, but some ain't got  
 And some have heads but some do not.  
 What mashugana did this?  
 And he's coating them in porcelain, making models, making dolls!  
 Dolly Blue! Dolly Blue!  
 Encasing bloody corpses in shiny porcelain shells!  
 My flowers are bleeding! bleeding all over my hands!  
 Bleeding bouquet, blood stained wedding!  
 Run away to land! Run away to land!

*(Bluebeard's Voice Over comes in, Dolly responds choreographically)*  
 On your knees whore!  
 Dirty whore! Bloody whore!

I see your scarlet stained hands!  
 You disobeyed my wishes wife  
 And now the roses weep tears of blood for you.  
 Caught red handed harlot!  
 My doll, my Dolly Blue. Your character betrayed you love  
 and now your role is finally cast.  
 Calm yourself woman, be willing in your whorish heart,  
 Die for the sins of your kind.  
 Hush hush little one! little baby girl! silence your tongue.  
 This is how it will be done.  
 I will cover you in porcelain and carve you at the knee  
 And place you as a figure head against the raging seas!  
 Dolly Blue! Dolly Blue!  
 Sealed forever in your own horrific humour!  
 So suffer for me pretty, suffer for me sweet,  
 As I rip out your throat and cut off your feet!

*(Dolly comes forward on her knees)*

You see me in the navy  
 I'm the boys favourite tattoo,  
 For I'm the proud peacock lady  
 on the ship the Dolly Blue.  
 The most flirtatious little figurehead to ever sail the seas,  
 A porcelain naked lady,  
 Sawn right off at the knees.  
 I graced the ocean with my charms,  
 A firm hold on all my crew,  
 Deep, dark, cavernous and watertight,  
 My vessel rich and jewelled.  
 I bared my breasts at icebergs and amazons alike,  
 My twelve eyes blinking blindly  
 Through thick velvet seas of night.

*(Sailor comes on as change to Violet Rose occurs)*

All the sailors wept for Dolly's death as the captain lied to the  
 crew:  
 'The fever took my little doll at the tender age of twenty two'  
 For days he stayed with her corpse lain in his private quarters,  
 gripped by a strange and necromantic love, poor soul,  
 he couldn't bear to leave her.  
 At last he surfaced, a figurehead in his arms,  
 you know he'd only gone and cast a model Dolly to fix upon the  
 mast, it was a strange old work of art.  
 Such a maritime masterpiece was this mistress marionette.  
 A puppet of catastrophe created to protect?  
 Possessed by haunted tragedy, this painful porcelain effigy  
 knew some sickly secret of a dark and twisted sin.  
 So when they nailed the figurehead firmly to the fore,

the sea she did a grumble, oh the sea she did a roar.  
 She was swollen, rude and angry, magnificent and sore.  
 And they struggled day and night to keep us afloat,  
 To keep the bloody thing from sinkin'.  
 In the wet and cold and dark all the time the lads were thinkin'  
 the lady is a jinx, the lady is a jinx.  
 When suddenly a thing like you'd never seen rose up out of the  
 water.  
 A colossal monster from the deep  
 The sailors wept and trembled  
 They prayed 'dear lord please save our skins'  
 But bloody was their fate and the mess that they were in.  
 With blinding beauty, she was wicked, she was angry, she was all.  
 A screeching bird-fish demon hovering high above us all.  
 Warped tendrils for limbs,  
 She evil octopi-peacock  
 Eight deadly stems  
 Ten eyes flashing like a fruit machine  
 Oh what a murderous mood she was in.  
 The raging destructress adorned with monstrous purple flowers.  
 the Violet Rose of Violence.  
 She of deadly feminine powers.

*(Followed by the Violet Rose Dance and then the bone dance)*  
*(Demonic Child swings as Violet Rose changes to Bloody Pearl)*  
 And so it came to pass, dear audience, that the avenging angry  
 monster lady, Violet Rose,  
 An incarnation formed from the bleeding petals of a macabre  
 wedding bouquet  
 And the bitter tears of Dolly Blue that fell on them,  
 Did rip apart the ship the 'Dolly Blue' and all who sailed in  
 her.  
 The battle of boat and she-monster crashed against an oyster bed  
 crushing the hard mollusc shells laid there under.  
 Out flooded the delicate interiors; the oyster flesh and pearls,  
 On to which drip-dripped the blood of our lady, the destructress.  
 She who gave her life to destroy the sins of men.  
 And from out of the wreckage, born to mother of pearl, she was  
 formed.  
 Bloody Pearl, a creature, rose up and walked on the water.  
 The she-thing peeled the tattooed skins off the sailors corpses,  
 Creature of her own conception, Bloody Pearl, Bloody Pearl.  
 The outsider, the survivor.  
 Never to forget the evil deeds of Captain Blue,  
 She stalks the earth in search of retribution.  
 Misunderstood and ostracized,  
 Lonely and depraved.  
 The mythological martyr madame,

The night stalking whore,  
Down by the docks,  
Our Lady of Survival.

*(Sailor gives monologue from the corner as Pearl does the act)*

This is the ballad of Bloody Pearl,  
A fable amongst sailors and old street girls.  
In ports across the ocean at the dead of night you'll find her,  
She'll do you for a string of pearls  
For that's her favourite tender  
But beware, beware I warn you,  
That's not what she's after.  
She'll take your skin, your fleshy shells  
And sew the bits together  
For a dress no less: A dress I say!  
A dress of human leather.  
This scarlet tattooed rose,  
with thorns that pierce and peel  
Will charm you with illusion,  
Illusion that will kill  
but between her thighs, deep inside  
she keeps her favourite weapon,  
a stash of golden pearls that burn,  
burn the eyes of drunken lies.  
And so she wanders, darkly she roams the earth by night,  
Her pearls of gold a secret  
From the relentless, heartless light.

**THE TEXT OF A CEREMONY OF VESTITION (A CEREMONY WHERE A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC ENTERS THE ORDER AS A NOVICE) CONDUCTED BY THE MANCHESTER HOUSE (THE CONVENT OF THE SWISHING CURTAIN)**

**This transcript is a direct re-presentation of the original production script produced with the permission of its author/s. No changes/corrections have been made to the spelling, grammar, syntax or punctuation.**

The ceremony opens with the Call.

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

**Congregation:** To bona you varda!

**Sister Celebrant:** I call upon this postulant, wishing to test his vocation to come forward in his emotional nakedness and unashamedness. He wishes to test his vocation in the world-wide Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and is about to enter the novitiate.....

..... We take him unnamed and unclothed and we give him a name and clothe him. Bona to varda you dolly old eke!

**Congregation:** To bona you varda!

**The Testing of the Vocation**

**Sister Celebrant:** Sister, do you desire to test your vocation to become one with the Order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence?

**Postulant:** I do so desire. Hail, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

**Sister Celebrant:** Will you submit to the joyful discipline of the Novitiate and attend required gatherings of the Order?

**Postulant:** I will strive to do so, extreme poverty, and the vagaries of the petty politics of the Manchester Gay Community permitting.

**Sister Celebrant:** Who is here willing to take the postulant, to nurture him in the ways of the Order and offer him the succour? Who here will be Novice Mistress to our new Sister?

**Novice Mistress:** I, Sister Gypsy TV Filmstar, will be Novice Mistress to this postulant. I will offer him guidance, support and succour throughout his progress through the Novitiate.

**Sister Celebrant:** Sister, will you submit to the ministrations of Sister Gypsy TV Filmstar and accept guidance from him in all matters concerning the Order? Will you do his bidding that you may learn about the Order?  
Will you be bound by the will of the autonomous collective of the Manchester Convent of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence?

**Postulant:** I will strive to do so.

**Congregation:** Hail, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

**Sister Celebrant:** Do you promise to spread the word of Perpetual Indulgence to the Gathered Faithful, from the heart of the Manchester's Gay Village to the remotest outpost of Queerdom?

**Postulant:** I will strive to do so.

**Congregation:** Hail, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

**Sister Celebrant:** Do you promise to promulgate universal joy and expiate Stigmatic Guilt? Do you promise to forgo the physical support of underwear?

**Postulant:** I will strive to do so.

**Congregation:** Hail, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

### **The Offerings**

**Sister Celebrant:** What gifts do you bring to the Order? Be mindful that the Order is in bondage to the vow of poverty and cannot accept goods for itself.

**Postulant:** I offer up my body and heart to the Promulgation of Universal Joy  
And to the Expiation of Stigmatic Guilt and I offer up.... (as many scandalous and wilful deeds that can be thought of)..

**Sister Celebrant:** Do you offer these gifts wilfully and joyfully?

**Postulant:** I do.

**Congregation:** Hail, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

## The Naming

**Sister Celebrant:** What name do you take?

**Postulant:** I take the name of Sister.....

**Sister Celebrant:** Who offers up this habit to Sister.....?

**Novice Mistress:** I do.

**Congregation:** Hail, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

**Sister Celebrant:** Sister, receive the habit of a Novice of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence. May you wear it with courage and pride!

## The Clothing.

The Sister Celebrant recites the following text as the garments are handed to the postulant:

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

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

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

(*Wimple*) This is your Wimple, starched and white,  
It will remind you you're a nun by being tight.  
You will find your words will have to be few,  
And eating will be a problem, too!

(*Guimpe*) The word for this here cloth is Guimpe  
Spelt like 'limp' but pronounced like 'camp',  
Keep it starched and tight like a jib  
And never use it as a bib!

*(Bandeau)* This is your Bandeau, stiff and strong,  
It shows the vocation to which you belong,  
Universal Joy, let it shine through!  
It will be a handy sweat -band, too.

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

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

The Novice kneels before Sister Celebrant. A candle is lit and the Sister Celebrant gives it to the Novice.

**Sister Celebrant:** Be a light of freedom and a celebration of joy. Cast out the shadows  
For now and forever more!

The Novice is sprinkled with consecrated water, incense is burned

### **The Blessing**

**Sister Celebrant:** I now present Sister..... to you as a member of the Order of Sisters  
of Perpetual Indulgence. Bona to varda your dolly old eke!

**Congregation:** To varda to you bona! Hail, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence!

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Plate

1	Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence	<i>Photographer:</i> David Martin
2	The Divine Feud	<i>Photographer:</i> Nick Clarke
3	The Divine David	<i>Photographer:</i> DeLuxe
4	Amy Lamé	<i>Photographer:</i> Piers Allardyce
5	'Dolly Blue' (Marisa Carr)	<i>Photographer:</i> Cathy Tollet
6	'Violet Rose' (Marisa Carr)	<i>Photographer:</i> Cathy Tollet
7	Ivan Cartwright	<i>Photographer:</i> Jean-Marc Prouveur
8	Doo Cot's <i>Peacock</i>	<i>Photographer:</i> Ann McGuinness
9	Mr. Gay UK	<i>Mr. Gay UK Ltd.</i>
10	Mr. Gay UK Tattoo	<i>Mr. Gay UK Ltd.</i>
11	"	<i>Mr. Gay UK Ltd.</i>
12	<i>Freak Orlando</i>	<i>Ulrike Ottinger Film Production, Berlin.</i>
13	Bearded man in dress	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
14	Two fat drag Queens	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
15	Horned man	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
16	S/M dykes	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
17	Carnival float	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
18	Man in carnival mask	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
19	"	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
20	Woman in carnival mask	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
21	Woman in hooped dress	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
22	Bearded man in scarlet dress	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
23	Bearded man in mini skirt	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
24	Sister of Perpetual Indulgence	<i>Photographer:</i> Jez Dolan
25	" (street performance)	<i>Photographer:</i> David Martin
26	Bizarre clown 'dancer'	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
27	Wedding couple (female)	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
28	Wedding couple ( male)	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
29	'Bishop'	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
30	Drag Kings	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
31	Drag Queen with pink wig	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
32	Drag Queen with red boa	<i>Photographer:</i> Bruce Howard Bayley
33	White Angel	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle
34	'Angel of the North'	<i>Photographer:</i> Tom Castle