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Source: *Discourse*, Fall 1992, Vol. 15, No. 1, Essays in Lesbian and Gay Studies (Fall 1992), pp. 112-127

Published by: Wayne State University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41389251>

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Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo

June L. Reich

To revolt outright against patriarchy is to affirm its authority. To righteously confront it is to see patriarchy as a monolithic whole free of contradiction and more powerful than it is. Such righteousness means denial that patriarchy is part of us, and thus forces us to define ourselves *in contrast to*. Better to acknowledge patriarchy and undermine from within, gently erode, recognize discrepancies, play with the roles, the language and the symbols, and let the play itself rob them of their terrifying power.

— Carol LeMasters (28)

Alex extracted her [Michael's] cock. Kay was already at her elbow with a can of Crisco and a towel. "Room service," she grinned. "Oh, yeah, slick it up, stud, get that big fuckpole ready to do that fine piece a favor. Gonna fuck that slut right offa those high-heeled shoes."

— Pat Califia (120)

This is an essay on boys and girls, or those who would-be-boys and those who would-be-girls. It's the parable of genderfuck, a little prick living in a capitalist, postmodern world.

Genderfuck: Susie Bright says, "When we want to compliment someone's visual menu, we say 'genderfuck' instead of androgynous" (9). She wrote this in 1989, in her "Toys For Us" column of the fifth-anniversary issue of *On Our Backs*. Although

she was talking about fashion, not theory, her definition condenses a history of discourse and materialism that touches on how we live our lives as queers and straights, girls and boys, and consumers of culture.

In the "Toys for Us" essay, "A Star is Porn," Bright predicted for the gay or "post gay" nineties a sexual liberation theme of "Get Over Yourself" (8). What is this "get over yourself" call to arms? The end of identity politics? Yes. Are we defined by who we are, or by what communities we are part of? No . . . "To get over yourself" is counter-identity politics. It's the *modus operandi*: we are defined not by who we are but by what we do. This is effectively a politics of performance. It neither fixes nor denies specific sexual and gendered identifications but accomplishes something else. This paper is an exploration of the imperative of that something else.

As many theorists have argued, sexuality and gender are interrelated but distinctive cultural constructions, and sexuality, in particular, must be thought of as irreducible to gender.¹ There are contradictions that inhere, let's say, in the difference between myself in the shower (as a woman — gendered) and myself in bed (as a femme — sexualized) that need to be articulated through a theory of genderfuck, which "deconstructs" the psychoanalytic concept of difference without subscribing to any heterosexist or anatomical truths about the relations of sex to gender (you remember the binarisms, male=male, female=female, male=aggressive, female=passive, etc.) Instead, genderfuck structures meaning in a symbol-performance matrix that crosses through sex and gender and destabilizes the boundaries of our recognition of sex, gender, and sexual practice.

In the fall of 1989, already out as a lesbian and a femme, I began coming out as a "genderfucker." What this means, basically, is that I began a reinvigorated reading of the discontinuity between sex and gender, during sex, in my performance as a "girl" on the streets, and in intellectual pursuits in the realms of phallogocentrism.

Although I don't want to theorize lesbian sexuality as the privileged site of genderfuck and feminist political practice, I understand genderfuck most clearly within the context of butch/femme role playing. Butch/femme offers a rich history for talking about bodies, identities, and agential politics in a way that hopefully furthers the work of breaking down multiple oppressions.

Butch/Femme History: Condensed

Butch/femme has been a recognizable lesbian practice for a very long time. Masculine and feminine women couples historically have been recognized as lesbians when less conspicuous sisters passed (as straights, or unnoticed) on the streets. Consequently, because of their visual recognizability, butch/femme codes have enjoyed various sociopolitical meanings. In the 1950s, with underground lesbian social organizations (like the Daughters of Bilitis) and publications beginning surreptitious discussions about sex, butch/femme was often criticized for not conforming with mainstream fashion. Joan Nestle has eloquently documented the 1950s as, among other things, assimilationist times for lesbians:

Butch-femme was an erotic partnership serving both as a conspicuous flag of rebellion and as an intimate exploration of women's sexuality. It was not an accident that butch-femme couples suffered the most street abuse and provoked more assimilated or closeted Lesbians to plead with them not to be so obvious. . . .

The butch-femme couple embarrassed other Lesbians (and still does) because they made Lesbians culturally visible, a terrifying act for the 1950s. . . . The desire for passing, combined with the radical work of survival that the *Ladder* [published from 1956 to 1972] was undertaking, was a paradox created by the America of the fifties. . . . To survive meant to take a public stance of societal cleanliness. But in the pages of the journal itself, all dimensions of Lesbian life were explored including butch-femme relationships. The *Ladder* brought off a unique balancing act for the 1950s. It gave nourishment to a secret and subversive life while it flew the flag of assimilation. (101-02)

Nestle's essay, which she says took forty years to write, is part of a huge body of literature and sweat that foregrounds the conflicts between lesbianism and feminism. In *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Alice Echols argues that lesbianism from the beginning constituted a "problem" for feminism":

Until late 1969, opponents of women's liberation were more apt to raise the issue of lesbianism than were many radical feminists — many of whom were initially befuddled by the conjoining of these seemingly disparate issues. Of course, some radical feminists did allude to sexual prefer-

ence, if only obliquely in the context of sexual liberation. While most early radical feminists believed that the sexual revolution of the '60s was in many respects more exploitative than liberating, they nonetheless envisioned feminism dismantling the edifice of sexual repression. . . .

But many radical feminists, especially those who viewed women's liberation and sexual liberation as mutually exclusive, were often skittish if not hostile toward lesbianism. Most commonly, they dismissed lesbianism as sexual rather than political. Thus Roxanne Dunbar of Cell 16 [an early radical feminist group] argued that the task of feminism was to get women out of bed rather than change the gender of their partners. . . . A number of radical feminist agreed [also] that lesbians were too attached to sex roles, in the form of butch-femme roles, to be likely or desirable recruits to feminism. Many also feared that lesbianism could become a refuge from feminist activism.

But at the same time that many radical feminists were rushing to disassociate feminism from lesbianism, many others — both politicoes and radical feminists — were discovering that they felt sexually attracted toward one another. . . . (211-12)

Eventually a strain of feminism and lesbianism cohered to become a lesbian-feminist movement (part of cultural feminism, which eventually superseded radical feminism as a mainstream political institution). This of course is not the end of the story (I still haven't entered the lesbian-feminist debate or even come out yet). Butch/femme continued to be disparaged, through the seventies and eighties, especially, in what has come to be known as the "sex wars" (see, for example, Vance). Arguing that butch/femme role-playing was "heteropatriarchal" and oppressive to women, cultural feminists began a campaign of sexual censorship, based on a philosophy that sexual representations and sex itself were transparent agents of women's oppression (rather than complex cultural expressions). Butch/femme became to some symbolic extent more dangerous than it had in the fifties, at least in terms of feminist debate: role-playing became s&m (a conflation that distorts a continuum of sexual practices), and s&m was vilified. But by this time, the pornographic and erotic works of lesbians, and discussions of their meanings and values, became more public; and in the 1980s popular critical theories by and for a sophisticated "queer" audience began popping up, so that the semiotics of fashion and sex codes, postmodernism, and a host of other topics enjoyed a vogue that is still prevalent. (I came out by this time.)²

Framing the Phallus

I begin my theory of genderfuck with the dildo. It is, in fact, my *raison d'être*, my personal philosophy, akin to religion. But before I follow this all-important theoretical vein, I would like to frame the phallus in its psychoanalytic (Lacanian) and literary contexts, briefly, in order to engage the slippery theoretical practice of reading and writing the body.

The phallus, broadly speaking, forces a subject into the Symbolic, the realm of language, signification, and culture. In theory it is not an object, or an organ, but an experience of difference (even, or especially, primary sexual difference), initiating a subject into desire, which is an experience of lack. The phallus, as “point zero” in psychoanalytic theory, determines meaning by filling in absences, covering over the split it creates between object and concept. The logic of signification demands that a concept and object be identical to one another. And yet the phallus, as the determining figure in signification, like a zero, does not really exist. The zero institutes the process of numerical progression, but it signifies nothing. It assures, however, that $1=1$ because of its place/function as zero ($1+0=1$; but 1 is, nevertheless, the 2nd point on the number line, and is therefore always already displaced) (Miller; for more on “suture,” see also Heath). Through a theoretically analogous process, the phallus signifies a pretended or fantasmatic unity, suturing object and concept in a dialectical relationship with a subject.

Unity could be thought of as a consensus of meaning, or of referentiality. In the traffic of signifiers and signifieds, there is potentially unlimited play that prevents meaning from settling into one cozy, specific definition. But, as the process of interpretation forces an inevitable rest at signified, political interference at the point of representation is critical. The phallus has for too long been associated with being or not being the penis (this is heterosexism), even in abstract mathematical theory, and often most vehemently when this connection is being disavowed (see Gayle Rubin’s critique of psychoanalysis in “The Traffic in Women”). In this respect, the phallus can deconstruct itself into total nothingness without upsetting sex/gender binarisms and privileging male constructions of desire. If it is possible, through genderfuck, however, to interrupt the referentiality of the phallus, a theory of subjectivity and desire could be expounded without making phallogocentrism an accusation of exclusive (that is, male-centered) practice, but one process (among many) that produces meaning and knowledge. Because, as I hope to expose,

women already possess the phallus, though how, where, why, and to what extent we do is hotly contested.

The Dildo*

(*Dildos are measured from their bases to their heads, making allowances for slight loss in length if they are to be used with a harness. I would appreciate if this system were applied to my essay when determining its desirability. Please measure concepts from base of page to header, and observe safe reading practices when moving from one section to another. Borders are permeable.)

The question fueling this investigation of genderfuck is: "What is the difference between a woman with a strap-on and a man?" Assuming that the symbolic man wants to fuck and not be fucked (which I would assume makes him femme), I would argue that in a libidinal economy there is no structural difference. Butch/femme relations are constructed around difference, or hetero-sexuality, if you like (though this is not to say "straight" sex).

"Subject positions" have consumed much recent feminist theory, building on psychoanalytic and ideological critiques in order to elucidate a point from where women can act without being erased or posited as non-subjects, or the negative of the "masculine." Sue-Ellen Case, in "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," argues that butch-femme subject positions allow an articulation of agency in a way heterosexual female positions fail to. Beginning with Teresa de Lauretis's "feminist subject," who accomplishes a "sense of self-determination at the micropolitical level" (282), Case proposes for feminism coupled butch-femme subjects that "do not impale themselves on the poles of sexual difference or metaphysical values, but constantly seduce the sign system, through flirtation and inconstancy into the light fondle of artifice, replacing the Lacanian slash with a lesbian bar" (283). Taking up Case's aesthetic argument, I would like to forward the coupled butch-femme subject into the explicit realm of the phallic.

Case's aesthetic hinges on artifice and the discourse/performance of camp. She argues first that psychoanalysis has hegemonically consigned femininity to a passive performance of "masquerade," a position that is purely negative excess. Then, building upon the history of feminist masquerade theories themselves based on Joan Riviere's watershed reading of a frigid intel-



Advertisement for Jupiter I & II and Adam I & II by Scorio. *On Our Backs* 8.6 (1992): 2.

lectual woman patient, Case maintains that feminine masquerade remains passive only within the construct of assumed heterosexuality. Riviere's argument is this: the intellectual frigid woman, having symbolically castrated her father by virtue of her intellectual acumen, assumes feminine behavior as a reaction-formation against this taboo. Riviere notes that "heterosexual women don't claim possession [of the penis] openly, but through reaction formations; whereas the homosexual women openly display their possession of the penis and count on the males' recognition of defeat" (Case 291). Case maintains that this open display is "consciously played out in butch-femme roles":

The butch is the lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of the penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness. The femme however, foregrounds her masquerade by playing to a butch, another woman in a role; likewise, the butch exhibits her penis to a woman who is playing the role of compensatory castration. . . . [Because] there is no referent [for the penis] in sight, the fictions of penis and castration become ironized and "camped up." . . . These women play on the phallic economy rather than to it. (291)

Heterosexual masquerade theories stabilize the feminine=passive/masculine=active equation in biological terms, so that "women" are only able to assume an active position by taking on a male perspective. This has proven to be problematic for feminist theorists, who have been forced to argue, as a logical consequence, that active pleasure can only be taken by men or women acting like men. A way out of this bind has been to foreground, by "camping it up," the irony of the masculine and feminine positions themselves, so that the cultural constructions of gender are highlighted. Case maintains that in butch=femme camp, both partners are performers, because the penis is conspicuously absent and women are playing to each other. And while she maintains, rightly so, that this move both highlights and subverts cultural constructs of gender, it does not alter the masquerade, which necessitates a *distance* between a performer herself (whatever that is — even if it is argued that there is no essential self) and the construct she performs. While the players have shifted from male-female (penis present) to butch-femme (penis absent), the distance between the gendered body and sexual role playing has remained structurally equal. I would like to argue that foregrounding the distance between the phallus and *its* performance as penis or dildo would ironize the prescrip-

tive constructs of femininity and masculinity without necessarily distancing the gendered body from its sexual materiality in performance. This strategy hopefully reinstates an embodiment that is sorely lacking in current deconstructive and performative theories.

Case's definition of the butch-femme subject position bears repeating here, because it is at this juncture that I would like to push some of its consequences: "These are not split subjects, suffering the torments of dominant ideology. They are coupled ones that do not impale themselves on the poles of sexual difference or metaphysical values . . ." (283). For one thing, her definition assumes an awareness about butch-femme relations that is necessary for camp but not always the lived experience of many butch and femme women. I find it interesting that most butch women I've talked with knew themselves as lesbians first and women second, while many femmes understood their identity foremost as womanly and most often tried on hetero relationships before acting on their lesbian desires.

Furthermore, Case's couple dances around penetration, the phallic act *par excellence*. She has ignored the dildo, and what our dynamic duo may be doing offstage, for a micropolitically safe space outside ideology. I am not arguing that this space doesn't exist or isn't useful (it's essential) for political change, but I wonder about what is glossed in the theoretics, specifically concerning the symbolic politics of penetration, fucking, phallic aggression, etc.

As a prosthesis, the dildo has often been accused of being the literalization of women's lack, a substitute penis, the object of women's desire. Desire for an other is confused with heterosexuality so-called³ when the penis is the referent for the phallus, and the dildo becomes a subordinate and stand-in for man. Consequently, lesbian penetration is confused with heterosexual so-called practice, rather than being constituted as a unique, or different, instance of meaning. This misunderstanding not only fuels straight misconceptions of lesbianism but has led to censorship within the feminist community, mostly by Lesbian Separatists who outlaw s&m practices at women-only functions, and anti-pornography feminists, who claim in various degrees that sex hurts women.

The dildo is a sutured phallus. Quite literally. Symbolically, however, it could be conceived of as *the* phallus. The dildo, by itself, is a funny-looking piece of molded silicone or rubber. But in context, it is a powerful fucker. It is the law of the Daddy Butch. As a phallus, it assures difference without essentializing gender.

And, I would argue, it could irreparably alter any inter-sex (or gendered) relations when the libidinal paradigm is shifted from gender-identity to sexuality-performance.

When we inspect the dildoeed-girl and the dicked-boy for meaningful differences, I must insist that there is some substantive difference between them (there is a preference in who we take to bed, for instance). The consequence of this difference is the gendering of desire, since in structural terms the two figures are the same.

So I might offer the hypothesis that “boys” like to fuck and “girls” like to be fucked and situate these two positions, masculine and feminine, as extremes or poles of a gender/sexuality spectrum. The anatomical binarism male-female figures here as a kind of limit-text, one which works to undermine genderfuck if we insist on recognizing biological “realness” (“naturalness”) on the one hand, but which genderfucks if “realness” (as defined in *Paris Is Burning*⁴) works strictly at the level of the performance of dominant stereotypes without “corresponding” genitalia revealed. To my mind, these two situations figure the extremes of the anatomical axis.

A word about transsexuality: it works to stabilize the old sex/gender system by insisting on the dominant correspondence between gendered desire and biological sex. The feelings of acute discontinuity that lead to cosmetic alternation need theorizing apart from genderfuck. Pepper LaBajia, reigning Mother of the House of LaBajia and somewhat of a superstar because of the box-office success of *Paris Is Burning*, described the politics of anatomy best when she said she never wanted a sex-change. A vagina is no guarantee of security or happiness.

The consequences of the dildo-as-phallus are potentially far reaching for emancipating theory from the appeal to Truth. At the very least, the dildo schema announces the arbitrariness of the hegemonic phallus=penis construction, while attending to the rigid logic of the phallic economy. At its most radical, the dildo, as an equal-opportunity accessory, and as a simulacrum (an object circulating without origin), undermines the penis as a meaningfully stable organ, denaturalizing the body without erasing its materiality.

Using the dildo as an interpretive as well as a sexual device opens the field of identification to all sorts of contradictory constructions. My femininity, for example, is an instance of drag performance (that is, genderfucked). Not only are there positions for feminine women and masculine men, manly women and womanly men (these can be accomplished through mas-

querade theories), there is also space for queer or straight butch and femme identities that traverse the theoretically spacialized continuum more than once. For instance, I know a butch woman who likes to be penetrated by a butch lover, pretending they are both gay men. Why should that be perverse?

Camp: "A Holiday for Consenting Adults"⁵

It's embarrassing to be solemn and treatise-like about Camp. One runs the risk of having, oneself, produced a very inferior piece of Camp.

— Susan Sontag (277)

My genderfuck sensibility has me questioning the self-conscious performance of virtually everyone I see on the streets or on the bus, although I am aware that not only are not many of these folks queer, gay, or straight, they probably have no notion of how radically different the economy of their desires would be in a relation of dildoic-phallic signification. In an effort to keep this paradigm in perspective, then, I will attempt a shift from the reading to the writing of the body. Both are discursive acts, public in nature but privatized ideologically. Reading practices generally are used in performative theories, but I think writing demands a specificity that makes generalizing the body more difficult. It also constructs the micropolitically safe space needed for positive agential politics.

I will contextualize reading/writing by utilizing butch/femme relations once again. As a femme, I am in a privileged position in relation to dominant culture because, while my object-choice may be thought to be perverse, my performance of myself is allied with dominant notions of femininity. My butch lover, on the other hand, constructs herself as a boy. To reconcile this dominant contradiction I would insist that she is a boy, in bed, and perhaps in varying degrees on the streets. This turns upside down not only cultural binarisms of sex and gender in sexual relationships, but also the dominant assumptions of who has the power to inscribe meaning on the bodies of others. As a femme, I do the writing, and I read, insuring not only my own non-erasure but also authorizing the noncontradiction of a butch's gender/sexual performance.

Yet performative politics are cooptable, or at least subject to easy misinterpretation. How is my femininity different than that of the straight woman with little self-consciousness of her gen-

dered construction; or, for that matter, what difference does it make if dominant culture can read her and me as essentially the same?

The language of performance, critical to the theoretics of postmodern bodies, usually constructs subject and object as spectator (reader) and performer (read) in a dualism that either forecloses or negativizes agentic possibilities. Without an alternative critical language, however, theories of performance are still preferable to those of identity. The crux of agentic possibility in performative language could be thought of as "presence," where the apparent paradox of mimesis, or the representation of the construction of representation (a self-conscious performance) is worked out within the limits of "verisimilitude," or what I have been calling "realness." Mimicry problematizes the real by representing both the presence and absence of a construction. It's hard to keep it up, though, as meaning is an excess, an effect the performer cannot control.

An aesthetics of pleasure, more precisely, offers no guaranteed effects, but involves a "leap of faith," a reading and writing that must take place with the consent of subjects. The dildo performance is "queer" not because it is part of gay or lesbian sex but because it doesn't respect the distinctions of a hetero/homosexual dichotomy. What limits an anything-goes in interpretation, however, is a politics of radical materiality, where the construction of the semiotic system on the body is accounted for.

Does the genderfuck performance, a mimicry, unmask the psychoanalytic constructions of feminine and masculine sexuality? The answer, it seems, relies on the referential position of the phallus. At the very least, repositioning the phallus as dildo radically alters the meanings of "being" and "having" in such a way that the constructions of sexuality cannot be reducible to anatomy, even though we can acknowledge primary sexual difference. The point is that difference, in itself, signifies nothing but needs an interpretation to effect meaning.

To ask, once again, some rude but important questions: does the site of woman's primary sexual difference constitute a lack or is it just a vagina? What does a woman with a vagina and with a dildo represent? A man, a masculine woman, the denaturalization of masculinity? If phallic homosexual practice were a mimicry of heterosexual genital-to-genital practice (and it could be conceived this way without being derogatory), its perversion is not the performative act but the subversion of the construction that naturalizes or normalizes heterosexual so-called practice.

Sexual practices are mimicry, differenced from themselves as concepts and objects. We are sutured, dildoed folks.

Camp is the celebration of passionate failures. The triumph of theatricality over substance, it is cynical, ironic, sentimental, pleasure-seeking, naively innocent, and corrupting. More importantly, it accomplishes more than mere inversion and duplicity; it alters traditional sensibilities altogether. In “Notes on ‘Camp,’ ” Sontag fingers a few really insightful aspects of camp, which I would sum up if I were only as erudite:

34. Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. Camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different — a supplementary[!] — set of values. (286)

55. Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation — not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or if it is cynicism, it’s not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.) Camp taste doesn’t propose that it is in bad taste to be serious; it doesn’t sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures.

56. Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges, the little triumphs and awkward intensities of “character.” . . . Camp taste identifies with what it is enjoying. People who share this sensibility are not laughing at the thing they label as “a camp,” they’re enjoying it. Camp is a tender feeling. (291-92)

Camp is also very homosexual; while it’s not exclusively so, it was, as Case says, born in the closet (287). Where Sontag fails to grasp the political ramifications of camp, many gay theorists have picked it up. I hope genderfuck will be seen as another quixotic incarnation.

In formulating my genderfuck theory I had three options, as I saw it, in camp territory: (1) the dildo most certainly is camp. Following this argument led me smack into Sue-Ellen Case’s lap (not a bad place to be, I should think). The dildo is nothing if not pure artifice, a “supplement” to the “natural” body. With butch/femme, “a strategy of appearances replaces a claim to truth. Thus, butch-femme roles evade the notion of ‘the female body’ as it predominates in feminist theory, dragging along its Freudian baggage and scopophilic transubstantiation. These roles are played in signs themselves and not in ontologies. Seduc-

tion, as a dramatic action, transforms all of these seeming realities into semiotic play" (297). However, I wanted to reclaim *some* body (anybody) and also challenge lesbianism as theory. So the dildo as camp isn't the whole picture, as I see it.

This brings me to (2) the penis as a camp object. As a dyke with no grudge against boys, I have little trouble with this deduction. By arguing that the dildo is more phallic than the penis, the male organ (to use a Senate Judiciary Committee turn-of-phrase) is somewhat depleted of its powers. In the light of the dildo it is not hard to see the penis as another masquerade of the phallus, ready-made with a "dildo envy" complex, and to subsequently foreground cultural constructions of masculinity.

And (3) the phallus itself must be camp, in relation to the dildo and in relation to itself. Here is the triumph of "instant character" over content, and also passionate failure. When the dildo denudes the penis it reincarnates the phallus in its image, not vice versa. Dildo phallocracy maintains that dildo, penis, and phallus are all camp entities.

Genderfuck

Genderfuck could be said to be the effect of unstable signifying practices in a libidinal economy of multiple sexualities. The production of a recognizable genderfuck paradigm, effected by camp "realness," alters the contextual process of signification by foregrounding the gap between sex and gender and producing different models of interpretation through different writing/reading practices. Genderfuck, as a mimetic, subversive performance, simultaneously traverses the phallic economy and exceeds it.

This process is the destabilization of gender as an analytic category, though it is not, necessarily, the signal of the end of gender (whose binarisms I have grown quite fond of in some respects). The play of masculine and feminine, on the body and/as (note the "lesbian bar") the text, subverts the possibility of possessing a unified subject position. Once woman, a symbol and construction, no longer equals female in any meaningful way — that is, once the split between anatomy and the semiotic is recognized in the process of interpretation — the economy of desire for an Other does not have to follow a heterosexist matrix. The ambiguity of the system is its interplay and constant negotiation between the meaningful productions of sex/gender, on the one hand, and gender/sexual performance, on the other. It is a

discourse of pleasure, producing desire in a subject who is able to get over herself and have it make a difference.

What is a genderfuck body? It is, to steal a phrase from Roland Barthes, a “*drag anchor*” (65; emphasis added). Drag: a performance that interrupts the circulation of the phallus in its attempt to fix, that is, anchor, signification. A drag anchor, far from centering a soul, casts a body loose in a queer sea of love.

Notes

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few folks: Judith Halberstam, Michelle Lekas, Carol Mason, Kitty Millet, John Mowitt, and Paula Rabinowitz. Also, for his interest and encouragement, David Halperin, and my friends from the “Flaunting It” conference, Cheryl Kader and Thomas Piontek. It’s been a ball.

¹ This argument was recently advanced by Sedgwick, especially chapter 1: “Ultimately, I do feel, a great deal depends — for all women, for lesbians, for gay men, and possibly for all men — on the fostering of our ability to arrive at understandings of sexuality that will respect a certain irreducibility in it to the terms and relations of gender” (16).

² I don’t know when exactly “queer theory” began, but the distinction “queer,” as opposed to “lesbian/gay,” marks a shift in theory.

³ I have borrowed the idea of the hyphenated heterosexuality *so-called* from Abelow. He talks about “cross-sex genital intercourse” as “sexual intercourse *so-called*.” This makes apparent the constructedness of sexual intercourse or heterosexuality, when dominant culture would have us believe its being is natural or normal, or that its meaning is clear and uncontested.

⁴ *Paris Is Burning* (1990), a film by Jennie Livingston, documents the balls of New York’s black and Latino gay male underground.

⁵ “CAMP RULES” 7.

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