LAUGHING LESBIANS: CAMP, SPECTATORSHIP, AND CITIZENSHIP

by

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This study, set in the context of the feminist sex wars, explores the performances of Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Split Britches throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The purpose of this study is to better understand the implications of a specific style of lesbian comedic performance, found at the WOW Café and defined here as lesbian camp, throughout a contentious era in feminist politics. The motivating questions for this study are: How can a performance inspire an activated spectatorship? How have lesbian comedic performance practices provoked feminist theory and practice?

Chapter II defines lesbian camp and attempts to trace a dialogue among lesbian performance critics and academics ruminating over lesbian camp and its existence. It also explores lesbian camp's relationship to drag and butch-femme as well as how lesbian camp functions within specific performances of Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana.

Chapter III argues that it is the very element of lesbian camp that brings forth the potential for an activated spectatorship. It is a chaotic, unstable environment that exposes and disassembles deep-seated fears, ideals, and practices seemingly inherent, although pragmatically constructed, to our communities and cultures throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. It presents a climate of resistance through the disruption of identificatory practices. This, in turn, provokes an activated spectatorship.

Chapter IV examines the effects these artists had on the larger stage of the feminist sex wars and culture wars. Holly Hughes, for example, became a national figure, defunded from the National Endowment for the Arts due to her subject of the queer body, then deemed obscene and pornographic. Split Britches were popularized by feminists in the academy not only for their creative techniques but also for their (de)construction of butch-femme coupling. Carmelita Tropicana brought drag to a whole new level with incorporation of male and female drag into her hybrid performances.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Women's One World—WOW Café—opened as a performance space in New York City in 1982. WOW stages work predominantly by lesbians but also by, "women and trans people of color, and women and trans people who identify as lesbians, bisexuals, and queer" ("Wow Cafe Mission Statement"). Its unique policy of "anything goes" established a community of artists exploring lesbian, feminist, bisexual, and transgendered identity, politics, and culture through performance: "There's nobody to say no. Just work the door a few times and you can have your own show, which we assumed was what everyone wanted. Our assumption was that you came to WOW looking for two things: pussy and a placc to perform" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 15). Its dual focus on performance and community by and for women made it attractive to feminist and lesbian artists, activists, and critics. Within the first twenty years of the WOW Café, critics rewarded its performances with articles and books on many aspects of its contributions to lesbian/feminist theater. Only thirty years later, feminist performance critic Kate Davy is publishing (tentatively scheduled for December 2009) a much-anticipated comprehensive history of the predominantly feminist and lesbian performance venue. This dissertation advances an argument about an aspect of WOW Café: WOW performers used a particular (though hotly debated) form of comedy that I define as "lesbian camp," and that through lesbian camp the WOW artists fostered a dialogue not only

between themselves and their spectators, but also between feminist and lesbian theory and practice.

In an interview with David Román, Latina lesbian performance artist Carmelita Tropicana states, "One of the things I loved most about these early years at WOW is that we, that as lesbians, were able to come up with our own representations and have fun with them in the process. We had fights around these topics but we were all committed to supporting other's work" (87). Tropicana's words allude to what makes the WOW Café's productions so compelling to me: the connection between the WOW performances and culture/politics of the lesbian and feminist communities, the exploration of representation without fear, and relationships strong enough to withstand disagreement and debate. The WOW cultivated a community of feminists and lesbians (and sometimes even feminist lesbians)—working, laughing, and loving lesbians and feminists. The participants at WOW were (re)establishing, (re)thinking, and (re)affirming what it meant to be a woman, a feminist, and a lesbian.

The WOW Cafe differed from other feminist and lesbian community centers because, as Kate Davy explains in an essay describing her research of the WOW festivals of 1980 and 1981, it was:

> genuinely groundbreaking but for reasons virtually no one can any longer recall . . . . What made WOW's festivals so breathtaking at the time cannot be recalled because it is counterintuitive; after all, feminists just didn't do that kind of thing back then. As we all know, feminists in 1980 were dour and prudish; they didn't think playfully about gender or positively about sex until the 1990s with the advent of

> queer culture, third wave feminism, and girl (or 'girrl') culture. ("Cultural Memory and the Lesbian Archive" 131)

Tropicana as well as others like Holly Hughes and Split Britches presented/performed at the WOW Café, Club Chandalier, the Pyramid Club, Club 57, PS 122, and the other East Village clubs. These artists pushed the boundaries of gender and sexuality in performance. Feminist and lesbian identifications were changing. Hughes, Tropicana, and Split Britches were complicating what it meant to be a feminist and a lesbian. As Davy stated, these artists were playful about gender and their work, while political, personal, and passionate, was also joyful. And this was the kind of lesbian/feminism I wanted to take part in.

I come to this study because many of the performers at the WOW Café are my heroes. Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana helped to bring me out of the closet with more grace, humility, and humor than I thought possible. I would be lying if I didn't admit to also possessing anger or frustration at the heteronormative hegemony; but Hughes, Split Britches, and Tropicana (as well as some others) expressed the possibilities of joy and community as they incongruously juxtaposed heteronormative, feminist, and lesbian reading and viewing practices as well as a reconsideration of theory and practice throughout a troubling time for feminists and lesbians, later defined as the feminist "sex wars". Feminist theorist Lisa Duggan describes the "sex wars" as "a series of bitter political and cultural battles over issues of sexuality [that] convulsed the nation–battles over the regulation of pornography, the scope of legal protections for gay people, the funding of allegedly 'obscene' art, the content of safe-sex education, the scope of reproductive freedom for women, the sexual content of public school curricula, and more" (1).

I grew up during the feminist sex wars and have struggled with my personal identity politics of woman, academic, lesbian, feminist, queer, and artist. This struggle is the motivation behind this dissertation. This struggle has compelled me to wonder if these artists (as well as others like them) were the catalyst for queer theory/practice and third wave feminism (the reconsideration of theory and practice I referred to earlier). Would feminism die, as some have alluded, because of the sex wars?[1] Did these lesbian artists participate directly in the discourses of the sex wars? If so, how, and if not, did they influence the sex wars? What has been the influence of these artists since the sex wars?

I participate in theater not only as a lighting designer but also as a feminist and *queer*.[2] I cannot and will not distinguish between myself as an artist, academic, and activist. I prefer to embrace and celebrate the tensions and contradictions that arise from my amalgamation. Therefore, this dissertation, like me, defies stringent categories of theater studies, performance studies, gender studies, lesbian studies, queer theory, history, or literary criticism. It, like the performances it aims to examine, uses and abuses the above-mentioned categories in order to contextualize a little more than a decade of lesbian comedic performance (1982-1994).

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[1] The death of feminism has been hotly debated. One of the more recent books published is: Chesler, Phyllis. *The Death of Feminism: What's Next in the Struggle for Women's Freedom*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

[2] The definition of queer is as slippery as its theoretical practices. Queer, for me, disrupts the binaries of categorizations such as homo/hetero, gay/lesbian, and masculine/feminine. Queer ruptures heteronormativity as "Truth" while focusing on desires and sexuality deemed Other. Lesbian performance critic Jill Dolan states, "to be queer is not who you *are*, it's what you *do*, it's your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment" ("Building a Theatrical Vernacular: Responsibility, Community, Ambivalence, and Queer Theater." *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater.* Ed. Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla. New York: New York UP, 2002.) 5. Queer looks for the gaps and contradictions, exposing the non-linear and non-hierarchical nature of power which in turn tends to disrupt identifications.

While WOW performers have certainly influenced performance theory, criticism, and practice throughout the last two decades,[3] I have focused this study on the contributions Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana have made to lesbian comedic performances, lesbian/feminist spectatorship in live performance, and lesbian/feminism in the academy, politics, and culture. I have specifically chosen these artists because I believe (1) they have a significant body of work in the genre of lesbian camp, (2) their scripts are published as well as videotaped in performance, (3) I have been a spectator for at least one of their performances, and (4) the body of their work falls throughout the feminist sex wars (1982 through 1994).

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the performances of Hughes, Split Britches and Tropicana were hotly debated in the academy[4] because lesbian subjectivity in performance influenced much of the lesbian performance criticism. In particular, it influenced the ways in which lesbian comedic performances were characterized. The term lesbian camp became problematic when, as Kate Davy asked, "how can agency for women be realized representationally in a theatrical configuration that once again, like all hegemonic discourses, privileges the male voice and erases women as speaking subjects" ("Fe/Male Impersonation" 132)? Alternatively, another prominent feminist lesbian performance critic, Sue Ellen Case, stated:

> The lesbian butch-femme tradition went into the feminist closet. Yet the closet, or the bars, with their hothouse atmosphere have produced what, in combination with

[3] See the expansive amount of work written by and about artists like the Five Lesbian Brothers, Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, Deb Margolin, Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Madeleine Olnek, as well as the women exploring the performances: Kate Davy, Sue Ellen Case, Jill Dolan, Alisa Solomon, C. Carr, Lynda Hart, and Peggy Phelan to name a few.

[4] In Chapter III, I will discuss one such discourse between critic Sue Ellen Case and Holly Hughes.

> the butch-femme couple, may provide the liberation of the feminist subject—the discourse of camp. . . . The closet has given us camp—the style, the discourse, the *mise en scène* of butch-femme roles ("Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 189).

It is my contention that lesbian camp is not only possible but thrives well beyond the butch-femme coupling. I believe that lesbian camp is an important element within lesbian communities because it establishes lesbian subjectivity with or without the butch-femme couple, it disrupts stringent identity categorizations, it is simultaneously celebratory and subversive within the lesbian communities as well as within mainstream heteronormative culture, it forces the audience members to leave their baggage at the door, and it creates an activated spectatorship.

In Chapter II, I define lesbian camp and attempt to trace a dialogue among lesbian performance critics and academics ruminating over lesbian camp and its existence. I also explore lesbian camp's relationship to drag and butch-femme as well as how it functions within specific performances of Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana.

Chapter III argues that it is the very element of lesbian comedic performance—this lesbian camp—that brings forth the potential for an activated spectatorship; that is to say, lesbian camp exposes society's recuperative tools in order to (re)define identity and identity politic. Lesbian camp focuses on the complexity and substantive character of its communities. It is a chaotic, unstable environment that exposes and disassembles deep-seated fears, ideals, and practices seemingly inherent, although pragmatically constructed, to our communities and cultures throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. It presents a climate of resistance through the disruption of identificatory practices. This, in turn, provokes an activated spectatorship.

Wrapped up in spectatorship, itself, are the elements of identity politics, subjectivity, ways of looking/seeing/gazing, and cultural conventions. Much of the scholarship on the topic of spectatorship has revolved around film and film theory (think bell hooks, Laura Mulvey, Teresa de Lauretis, and Kaja Silverman). I use some of film's theories on visual media that incorporate gaze theory and subjectivity to develop the visual vocabulary of lesbian camp and how it collapses the recuperative possibilities of heteronormative culture, mobilizing the spectators towards critique, celebration, and potentially change. In Chapter III, I explore the methods by which Hughes, Tropicana, and Split Britches create an activated spectatorship and what, if any, role the WOW Café played in achieving the effect.

Lastly, in Chapter IV, I examine the effects these artists had on the larger stage of the feminist sex wars and culture wars. Holly Hughes, for example, became a national figure, defunded from the National Endowment for the Arts due to her subject of the queer body, then deemed obscene and pornographic. Split Britches were popularized by feminists in the academy not only for their creative techniques but also for their (de)construction of butch-femme coupling. Carmelita Tropicana brought drag to a whole new level with incorporation of male and female drag into her hybrid performances. More specifically, I analyze how lesbian performance practices differed from popular theories and (political) methods of feminists during the period. I also explore how these performance practices have provoked feminist theory and practice since then.

During the feminist sex wars of the 1980s and early 1990s, communities, organizations, and friends were pressured by feminist organizations to identify with one side or the other: pro-sex versus anti-porn, pro-legalized prostitution versus anti-prostitution, or pro-sadomasochism (S&M) versus anti-S&M. Was feminism about banning prostitution and

pornography for the sake of protecting women, or was feminism about legalizing prostitution and unionizing the pornography industry so that women working in the sex industries could have access to healthcare or the justice system? Should there be HIV/AIDS education in public schools or should it remain a private enterprise? Along the same lines, should there be sex education in public schools or should it be left up to the parents and sometimes even the churches? Whose responsibility was it to talk about sex, sexuality, and safe sex practices? Where did sexual minorities fall within the feminist movement? Were S&M practices radical, as Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin advocated, or was S&M another possibility of dominance over women?

During these heated debates, feminist lesbians were increasingly marginalized. Within the larger feminist movement their voices and issues were ignored or lost among the other feminists. If lesbianism was discussed at all, it was as a theory and not as a practice. Feminists explored lesbian identity politic as an androgynous asexual environment of women caring for women:

> The woman-identified-woman commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical, and economic support. . . . The lesbian, woman-identified-woman, commits herself to women not only as an alternative to oppressive male/female relationships but primarily because she *loves* women. (Bunch 162)

In other words, lesbianism was seen as women supporting women (women as class) rather than women desiring other women (women as individuals). Mainstream feminism ignored or judged the tangible realities of lesbian lifestyle and culture—sexual desire, butch-femme relationships, race and class differences—and the dirty secrets like rampant alcoholism, domestic violence, and hate crimes perpetuated within lesbian relationships. For many

feminists, this theoretical lesbianism was a false utopia. The only problem was that it did not exist.

The gay rights movement also placed lesbians in a difficult position. The 1980s brought the HIV/AIDS epidemic to the gay community; HIV/AIDS was devastating, with daily death tolls in the thousands.[5] HIV/AIDS, in the early 1980s, mainly affected gay men and the vast numbers of men dying placed prevention and finding a cure (not to mention the simple acknowledgement that the epidemic existed) a top priority within the gay and lesbian movement. Once again, lesbians were forced to defer their politics.

Lesbians of color, facing multiple points of discrimination, were also feeling as though the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the gay movement did not include issues or address the tangible realities of their lives. Abortion rights were a priority for feminists but were not especially important to the lesbian community. HIV/AIDS, while affecting gay men and minorities, again had not directly influenced lesbians.[6] Meanwhile immigration, public safety, workers' rights, and living wages took on new meanings when balancing identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

And yet throughout the feminist sex wars, one could find small groups of lesbians across the United States exploring, and more importantly celebrating, lesbian culture and politics. The WOW Café was one of those places, and it did so through performance. Even while the feminist sex wars drained energy from the movement to the point where academics and the popular press alike were coining the phrase *post-feminism* and/or touting

[5] For statistical data please go to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website (last viewed on November 25, 2008): http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/slides/trends/slides/trends.pdf

[6] By this, I mean that woman-woman sexual practices were not directly impacted by the HIV/AIDS crisis. This is not to say that family and friends of lesbians were not affected.

the death of feminism, performers like Hughes, Tropicana, and Split Britches were lesbians engaging in feminist theory and practice.

By setting lesbian camp within the context of the feminist sex wars, I want to explore both the critics and the performers from the perspective of the next generation in order to reflect on what has worked theoretically and practically, while exciting my generation as well as the next toward critical thought and practices that work in this postmodern, third wave feminist, queer (whatever this all means) world of terrorism, recession, and general fear felt culturally, economically, politically, and personally. Obviously, feminists did not resolve all of the conflicts from the feminist sex wars or the culture wars of the 1980s. This study, I hope, will also remind us to continue to seek out our desires and maintain our joy while creating our art and advocating for our civil rights.

CHAPTER II

CAMP? LESBIAN COMEDIC PERFORMANCE

> *I launched my careers as a lesbian and as a waitress simultaneously. For a while they kind of fed off each other; there was a certain symbiosis. Someone has suggested this had something to do with me working in seafood restaurants, but you'd never catch me saying something so repulsive! . . . Meanwhile, back at the Red Lobster, I was working very hard to present myself as a lesbian separatist waitress. . . . THAT'S NOT FUNNY!*
>
> Hughes *Clit Notes* (197)

This introductory excerpt from playwright/performance artist Holly Hughes reveals and makes strange two stereotypes within lesbian culture: the feminist lesbian lack of humor and the lesbian propensity (especially since the late 1970s and early 1980s) for political correctness. Anthropologist Esther Newton speaks to the political correctness – to a feminist lesbian utopia, centering on egalitarian beliefs from the bedroom to the bar – within the lesbian feminist culture that Hughes confuses: "Within the women's movement, the 'politically correct' have led us to believe in and practice egalitarian sexuality, which we define as sexual partnering involving the functional (if not literal) interchangeability of partners and acts. Logically, there could be only one look and one role for all . . . and why lesbian feminists tend to look alike" ("The Misunderstanding" 172). But Hughes, in a red strapless dress with a modish blonde haircut and luscious red lips, speaks of a different kind of lesbian feminism; she speaks of difference and resistance not only to heteronormativity but also to what it means to be lesbian and feminist. Hughes leaves no room for the sacred;

preferring the profane, she directly relates to her audience while simultaneously challenging her audience's assumptions with bawdy fish jokes, feigned piousness, and reference to the lesbian/feminist light bulb joke—no spectator is left behind.

The focus of this chapter is to define lesbian camp through the performances of Carmelita Tropicana, Holly Hughes, and Split Britches. I begin by highlighting three fundamental elements of lesbian camp: lesbian camp leaves no spectator behind; lesbian camp is a visual culture built on incongruities and contingencies; and lesbian camp resides inside popular culture. Next, I explore the elements of camp accentuated by Tropicana's performance, *Memories of a Revolution* and Holly Hughes's *Clit Notes*. After Tropicana and Hughes, it becomes imperative to clarify the terms drag and butch-femme. By using feminist critics Kate Davy's and Sue Ellen Case's influential articles to aid in the definitions of butch-femme and drag, I illustrate the place of lesbian camp within lesbian comedic performance. Lastly, I explore Split Britches' *Belle Repriere* and how it layers both drag and butch-femme into it performances, disrupting identities and, once again, leaving no spectator behind.

Bringing each spectator along for the performance is one element of lesbian camp. Feminist theorist Pamela Robertson disagrees, stating, "camp is a reading/viewing practice which, by definition, is not available to all readers; for there to be a genuinely camp spectator, there must be another hypothetical spectator who views the object 'normally'" (17). And while I wholeheartedly agree with Robertson on camp (including lesbian camp) as a reading and viewing practice, I believe that lesbian camp asks its spectators to leave their cultural and emotional baggage at the door of the performance venue without the possibility of retrieving the baggage after the performance ends because the performers have either stolen the baggage or shredded it to pieces. Leaving no spectator behind does not mean that

there is universality to lesbian camp or the readings/viewings of the performances; rather, as theorist Lynda Hart states, "the possibility is open for spectators to substitute their own identifications or to overlay them onto the performers, thus 'universalizing' the performance"(*Acting Out* 131). Chapter III will return to the spectator's relationship with the performances. Nevertheless, lesbian camp (not unlike other forms of camp) layers its performances with iconic images from all aspects of the performers' daily lives and experiences which in turn allows for multiple sites of identification.

Another element in lesbian camp is its visual culture built on incongruity, where meanings are contingent on relationships between performer(s), spectators, text, history, politics, and necessity. The productions use our (spectators' and performers') knowledge and truths against ourselves. Lesbian camp unsettles our beliefs and normative conventions while at the same time celebrating our popular culture, our humanity, our differences, and our histories. An important principle to remember is that lesbian camp's play on popular culture elements comes, at least partially, from within popular culture; it is not the outsider looking in, rather it is an exploration of heteronormativity, lesbian, and feminism from the inside out.

Camp, whether it be lesbian or not, is not an art form that can completely reside outside of the mainstream of popular culture. Since camp is a disidentificatory strategy (meaning that it exposes the normative or popular cultures identity politic as a construct and then dismantles the identity, recycling it for the purposes of recreating possibilities), it engages popular culture from within. It is not a finger wagging "I know better than you" performance. Residing partially inside popular culture by no means designates the producers of camp fully within the realm of normative culture. In fact, camp is used by those who, as

Teresa de Lauretis states, "[refuse] to accept and to live by the homophobic categories promoted by sexology: man and woman, with their respective deviant forms, the effeminate man and the mannish woman—a refusal that in the terms of my argument could be seen as a rejection of the hommo-sexual[7] categories of gender, a refusal of sexual (in)difference" ("Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" 160). The tangibility of living outside accepted norms of society has the potential to create a critical standpoint disrupting the heteronormative plot, which in turn has the potential to produce the performative strategies of camp.

Performer Alina Troyano, aka Carmelita Tropicana, while trying to dismantle notorious images of Latina, Lesbian, and Woman, first embraces the stereotypes before she starts to break them apart; hence, Tropicana's signature red sequin strapless dress and fruit boa, which is certainly a play on Carmen Miranda (*Chica Chica Boom Chic*) and Chiquita® banana's logo. Additionally, the name Tropicana inherits the historicity of Cuba's infamous Tropicana Club (known for its dancing, costumes, gangsters, and music), Desi Arnaz's Club Tropicana from *I Love Lucy*, Tropicana orange juice, and even Wham!'s 1983 hit, *Club Tropicana*, with lyrics including: "Let me take you to the place where membership's a smiling face—brush shoulders with the stars—where strangers take you by the hand and welcome you to wonderland—from beneath their panamas." Troyano/Tropicana is not attempting to assimilate through her use of stereotypical images; rather, she is creating an image of Latina that is simultaneously recognizable and impudent. Troyano/Tropicana's performance is a

[7] Here de Lauretis is playing off of Luce Irigaray's pun on the French/Latin word of homme meaning man and the Greek homo for same. The word hommo or hom(m)os-sexual for de Lauretis and Irgaray comes to mean sexual indifference and becomes their symbol for heterosexuality as it is the normative practice that disallows alternative sexualities (de Lauretis, Teresa. "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation." *Theater Journal* 40.2 (1988): 156).

grand gesture; a *Gestus* (Brecht's social and historic gesture) meant to estrange the spectators' (un)conscious attitudes toward Latino/a culture.

Troyano/Tropicana's style of lesbian camp (as well as others) provokes the spectators but not always in a positive direction. Lesbian camp can be violent and aggressive and, while its multiple layers allow for moments of identification, it also unabashedly insults the viewer by exposing the spectators' and performers' assumptions and avoidances. In Troyano/Tropicana's 1986 production of *Memorias de la Revolución/Memories of the Revolution*, the dichotomy between identification and contempt is manifested in the first two scenes. The prologue takes place in front of a projected image of an archetypal 1940s postcard of Havana. The audience knows it is Havana because "Havana" is inscribed along the top of the postcard. Tropicana enters, carrying a red rose and in drag (Tropicana's drag performances will be discussed later in this chapter). She is wearing her trademark dress and high heels. She speaks in a thick Cuban-American accent about memories, revolution, and her brother. At the conclusion of the scene, Tropicana flings her rose into the audience and the lights black out. As the lights fade up for the next scene, the backdrop has changed to a projection of Havana's capitol building. Two women are standing in front of the projection, wearing comparable polka-dotted dresses. As they wait for Tropicana's brother, one of the women begin:

> BRENDAA. Oh Brendah, I can't believe we are actually in Havana—love capital of the world. Everything is so romantic. (Looking in dictionary) Albondigas.
>
> BRENDAH. Albóndigas. (Looking in dictionary) Meatballs.
>
> BRENDAA. I never knew Latin men could be so—
>
> BRENDAH. Sexy, virile, gay caballeros . . . .

BRENDAH. What time is it? He should be here by now.

BRENDAA. Brendah, in the tropics everything is slow. Maybe he overdid his siesta.

(Troyano *I, Carmelita Tropicana* 2-3)

Troyano/Tropicana, as with most of lesbian camp performers, uses visual imagery as well as innuendo and wit to accomplish her unapologetic effects—simultaneously pointed and excessive. Lesbian camp coerces its spectators to become self-reflexive, holding heteronormative culture in contempt, meaning that it compels us (the spectators) to revisit our dormant attitudes and assumptions toward particular stereotypes. In other words, lesbian camp activates its spectators in the revisiting of our (spectators') roles in the perpetuation of said stereotypes.

Setting aside the prologue for the moment, Troyano/Tropicana's scene 1 (above) assault on dominant heteronormative reading and viewing practices begins with the two women standing in front of a projection of Havana's capital building. The image becomes a three-dimensional snapshot of the tourists' slide show—the criterion that the women were there in their matching dresses searching, waiting, hoping for a romantic experience in the "love capital of the world." The women's matching dresses and matching names return the proverbial stereotype of all brown people looking alike to all white people looking alike, while at the same time mocking North Americans for their lack of interest in learning a language other than English (the mispronunciationof "meatball"). Additionally, scene 1 exposes North American and European stereotypical attitudes toward Latino culture: everything in life happens more slowly, the laziness of siestas, and the obvious objectification toward (in this case) Latino men (sexy, virile, gay gentlemen). Lastly, this scene emphasizes the stereotypical tourists' mentality of the Kodak moment. With each click

of the camera, the tourist captures a representation, a simulacrum of the culture rather than actually immersing him/herself into the environment. Of course, the Brenda(a/h)s are willing to immerse themselves into Tropicana's brother Machito for their "tropical" experience, literally using Machito as translator, guide, and companion.

Yet the translucency of Troyano/Tropicana's stereotypes allows for easy access into her multilingual, multicultural, and queer world. She, like other lesbian camp performers, works the stereotypes both ways (pardon the pun) and the back-and-forth relationship is one of the ways in which lesbian camp makes spectator identification possible. The stereotypes presented in scene 1 debunk cultural differences within and out of North American and Cuban cultures. In it, Troyano/Tropicana highlights moments of similarity across cultures that in turn allow the spectators to identify with one or the other or both. Assumptions are dismissed as cultural differences and similarities collide. North American tourists do not understand Spanish, while many immigrants come to the United States not knowing English. Tropical culture tends to be slow, while North American culture tends to move too fast—missing opportunities for relationships, or seeing only the surface—looking only in terms of the generalities of race, gender, and sexuality. But there is also a desire to engage one another, if only for a moment, to embrace the mysteries and differences, in this case, in the "love capital of the world."

Troyano/Tropicana also uses an element of lesbian camp that has been most thoroughly developed by feminist/queer philosopher Judith Butler as *gender performativity.* Butler defines gender performativity, with the help of Friedrich Nietzsche, as,

> constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The

> challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction adding to the deed—the deed is everything." There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is perfomatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result. (*Gender Trouble* 33)

Before going any further in developing the concept of gender performativity, it is important to state that gender performativity is not the same as getting up in the morning, going to the closet,[8] and choosing a gender to wear for the day. Rather, gender performativity can incorporate acts, gestures, and desires produced on "*the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 136). For Butler (and myself), gender is a social construct informed by Western culture's need to reify heterosexuality as the norm. Butler's theory of gender performativity entered the feminist discourse on nature vs. nurture (essentialism vs. social construction), building upon the work of Nietzsche and Rivière's masquerade (described later in this chapter), interpreting gender not as an essential attribute of the corporeality, but as a power construct meant to reaffirm a heterosexual unity between gender and sex. Gender performativity is the act, gesture, and/or desire of an identity that is impossible to achieve; it is a constant failed repetition of the ideal Wo/Man.

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[8] All facetiousness aside, gender performativity is not part of an individual's daily wardrobe—it is not so easily chosen. Judith Butler, in *Bodies That Matter* (a partial response to *Gender Trouble*) states, "this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity)." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discurisve Limits Of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 12-13.

Lesbian camp uses and abuses gender performativity through layering the practices of drag, cross-dressing, and butch-femme against gender performativity, which in turn not only exposes gender's construction but also heteronormative culture's reliance on the unity between gender and anatomical sex for its reproductive survival. Returning to Troyano/ Tropicana's prologue in *Memories of the Revolution*, the performance can then be read and/or viewed as a quote of a quote. Troyano/Tropicana is impersonating Woman. What I mean is that Troyano/Tropicana is consciously attempting to perform the ideal Woman. Involved in her performance is the impersonation of not only Woman but also, more specifically, a North American construct of Latina Woman. Troyano/Tropicana's prologue performance is clearly excessive, which in turn exposes not only the construction of gender but of race and ethnicity as well. Every aspect of her performance is precise in its excessiveness: the painted beauty mark on left cheek, the sequined gown, her high-heeled sandals, her tango rose, and her thick accent expose that there is no authentic Carmelita Tropicana. There is a tangible woman present, but she is constantly shifting through multiple identities and recycling references in order to politicize and, as queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz says, "imagine new realities" (*Disidentifications* 133).

Esther Newton has been a leader in the discourse on camp. Her book, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, based on her 1972 case study, is the culmination of two years of research on drag queens. The root of Newton's definition of camp is *incongruous juxtaposition*. It places inconsistent or disagreeing positions side-by-side in purposeful tension of one another. Incongruous juxtaposition may be an effect read upon a situation or an intentional creation. Newton also believes that intentional camp must possess a transformation. This may include, but is not limited to, masculine/feminine, high/low,

youth/maturity, and the sacred/profane. For Newton, the impersonator portrays incongruous juxtapositions most succinctly with a "perspective of moral deviance and, consequently of a 'spoiled identity'" (Newton "Role Models" 23). However, this spoiled identity is carried past the performance of the impersonator into the role-playing of homosexuals within daily life: the roles that happen at school, the gym, church, the office, parties, home, and with extended family. Therefore, she sees the impersonator's performance as the embodiment of camp: impersonators "are elevated positively by gay people to the extent that they have perfected a subcultural skill and to the extent that gay people are willing to oppose the heterosexual culture directly . . . . On the other hand, they are despised because they symbolize and embody the stigma" (Newton "Role Models" 22).

Not all impersonation is camp. What makes impersonation camp is the incongruous juxtaposition. What makes Troyano/Tropicana's impersonation lesbian camp, as seen in the prologue and scene 1, is the incongruous juxtapositions between the different stereotypes/ identifications of Woman and the tangible experiences of performers (and some spectators) as women. For Troyano, the role of Tropicana is that she

> plays with the stereotype of Latinas, for example, but she goes beyond it. She's the agent of her own story. Notice the women in the telenovelas, the Latino soap operas: they are always defined by the men in their lives. Latinas are stereotypically linked with heterosexual romance. Carmelita has her romances but she's a lesbian. That in itself breaks the Latina stereotype. (Román 87)

Meanwhile, the Brenda(a/h)s are impersonating the North American Woman. The actors layer a very precise form of femininity against their own, exposing the construction of their own genders as well as the ones created for *Memories of the Revolution*. Female-to-female

impersonations are tricky. The main question that comes to mind is: Isn't it just called acting? I will certainly admit up front that I am not an actor nor do I teach acting, but I believe there is a difference between acting and female-to-female impersonation. Female-to-female impersonation concentrates on differences between the ideal Woman and women; impersonation plays to the stereotype. It also performs similarly to Bertolt Brecht's "not . . . but" in that female-to-female impersonation is producing choices but always leaving the proverbial door open for additional readings and/or viewings. The Brenda(a/h)s disrupt Woman because their performances recreate Woman not only through their appearance (1950s high style and polka dots as well) but also through their actions. The Brenda(a/h)s produce Woman as other to their Latino Man, Machito (sexy, virile, gay, gentle, and sweet). Their (heterosexual) attraction to Machito stems from mystery and "lack"—the lack of Man—and therefore their performances become the representational Woman. Of course, as the play progresses, the Brenda(a/h)s' performances of Woman fail, as Troyano/Tropicana uses cross-dressing and female-to-male impersonations to complicate notions of Man. (Machito is performed by a female-to-male impersonator and his friend, who falls in love with one of the Brenda(a/h)s [and the desire is returned], is a female cross dresser.)

Troyano/Tropicana uses incongruous juxtapositions in alternative ways, producing a style of lesbian camp that highlights the constructedness of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Act 2, scene 1 in *Memories of the Revolution* provides distinct examples of incongruous juxtapositions as a way of corrupting the stereotypes of "lesbian" and "Latin-American" as well as embracing the contradictions of all that it means to be a Latin-American lesbian. The transparencies of Troyano/Tropicana's incongruities and her use of mixed media to layer the performance with explicit cultural references are almost "too

much," but the excess has the potential to surprise even the most decided spectators, disrupting our notions of the Cuban-American lesbian.

Act 2, scene 1, plies religion, language, culture, family, nationalism, literature, sexuality, and myth about one another in order to expose and denaturalize (while also celebrating) normative behavior. Camp uses and abuses normative culture. There is always a sense of celebration (why choose to dress up as the iconic, young, Marlon Brando if not to celebrate the film, masculinity, blatant sexuality), which is why camp is often read as apolitical and pointless. Camp is neither; instead, it seeks an understanding and a relationship with the norm in the same sense Others seek a relationship within the norm—through necessity. Camp as a strategy differs from traditional radical politics in that it seeks to simultaneously annihilate and assimilate, while the radical politic looks only to the former. Celebration does not directly relate to assimilation. Female drag is a perfect example, as it portrays the superstar femininity of Marilyn Monroe, Mae West, Judy Garland, at the same time it disrupts popular notions of gender stability, normativity, and essentialism, especially when used in performance through the removal of the wig, bass or baritone voice singing, or the exposing of chest hair.

Returning to *Memories of the Revolution*, every image has multiple meanings and multiple readings. Act Two begins with Tropicana escaping Cuba in a rowboat with two other companions. The year is 1955, it is night, and the boat has survived a storm at sea. Carmelita's comrades have fallen asleep and an apparition of the Virgin Mary appears. Beginning with the Virgin herself, we see Troyano/Tropicana debunking religion, colonialism, and the Jewish Mother, queering both the Cuban-American and non- Cuban-

American cultural connections and cultural memories, which include colonialism, slavery, revolution, war, exile, and sanctions.

Cultural memory is defined as "an act in the present by which individuals and groups constitute their identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common, and therefore often contested, norms, conventions, and practices" (Hirsch 5) and it plays an important role in Troyano/Tropicana's work. The title, *Memories of a Revolution*, is indicative of this. Troyano/Tropicana opens the piece, claiming, "Memories from the deep recess cavity of my mind, misty water. . . . Memorias-we all have them" (*I, Carmelita Tropicana* 2). This is a play about the memories, most of which have not been experienced by Troyano/Tropicana, of her family, her culture, and the history of exile as well as the influence, effort, and enterprise of the United States.

Troyano/Tropicana speaks between the two cultures, searching for representation, (re)creating the portraits of Cuban-Americans and the greater heteronormative convention in order to disrupt nostalgic memories and histories while simultaneously embracing the cultures she navigates. One such portrait is this scene between Carmelita Tropicana and the Virgin Mary. The scene is in direct dialogue not only with the larger western themes but also with specific event(s) in Cuban history. Tropicana and her two companions saved at sea by the Virgin Mary is a twist on the legend of Juan Morena and La Virgen de la Caridad from 1611. Morena, an African Slave, along with two indigenous brothers, Rodrigo and Juan Hoyos, were in the Bay of Nipe on their way to a salt mine when they floated past a figure of the Virgin Mary. When the three retrieved the icon, her white dress and veil were dry. A small wooden plaque found attached to the figure declared her La Virgen de la Caridad (Our Lady of Charity). Once taken ashore, the icon kept disappearing only to reappear with wet

clothing. This was seen as a sign, and a shrine was created near the copper mines in El Cobre. While there are several versions of this legend from both the Roman Catholics and the Santerías, La Virgen de la Caridad came to represent and protect the slaves of Cuba. The nineteenth century brought renewed focus on Our Lady of Charity, as she protected the revolutionaries, and still in the twentieth century, with the rise of Castro, she protects all those in exile and/or who hold anti-Castro sentiments. An additional shrine to Our Lady of Charity was created in Miami in the 1970s to aid in the protection of all the boats coming from Cuba to the United States.[9]

Our Lady of Charity has become a political as well as spiritual figure in Cuba and the Cuban-American communities. Troyano/Tropicana further politicizes the legend by inserting herself into the narrative. The insertion is not an incredibly radical position, as the tradition of Our Lady of Charity has always incorporated those typically silenced throughout history: slaves, revolutionaries (especially if they are not on the winning side), and the exiled. However, lesbian and gay contributions to Cuban and United States culture have historically been invisible, downplayed, or forgotten; yet, in act 2, scene 1, Tropicana is asked to use her art as a weapon and "To give dignity to Latin and Third World women . . ." (Troyano *I, Carmelita Tropicana* 38). It is here that I find camp most interesting, because in almost all aspects of camp, especially in lesbian camp, the line between performer/performance and individual/living is blurred. The Virgin Mary has delivered a message that is taken up by Tropicana not only within the world of the play but also within the unique life of Troyano/Tropicana. Her successful reinterpretation of the story of Our Lady of Charity

[9] For further information on Our Lady of Charity, please see: Tweed, Thomas A. *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at the Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami.* New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

works due to the *betwixt and between* of performance and life. The duplicity of performance/life and life/performance forces tensions between memories and histories, which in turn emphasize the constructiveness of culture, religion, sexuality, and gender.

Troyano/Tropicana continues to camp the event by complicating the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary appears on the screen via 16mm and is played by Uzi Parnes. Parnes's drag performance is immediately recognizable as the Virgin Mary. The performance irresistibly conjures images simultaneously holy, as in the meditative chapels of large churches (as well as shrines similar to the ones built in Miami and Cuba) throughout the western Christian world, and kitsch, as in the backyard garden icons of Roman Catholic neighbors of my youth. Parnes's performance further demystifies the Virgin Mary using double entendres and a falsetto voice; yet, the Virgin Mary remains intangible and orphic due to the contrast between live performance and film. The contrast between the three-dimensionality of Tropicana, the rowboat, and her sleeping compatriots, with the two-dimensionality of a projection screen, creates an immediate distinction between the Virgin Mary and the others, not to mention the fact that the Virgin Mary is the only character played by a man.

The Virgin Mary is held in high esteem within the Christian Church and, especially, the Roman Catholic Church. Christianity and, more specifically, Roman Catholicism are certainly part of Troyano/Tropicana's cultural traditions, whether or not she practices it herself. At the same time, the Virgin represents years of colonization; from Christopher Columbus's first visit until the Cuban Missile Crisis,[10] Cuba has been maltreated by the

[10] For a more specific understanding of the early relationship between Spain and Cuba, read: Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1942-Present.* New York: Harper Collins, 1999.

superpowers of its day. And yet, there is certainly joy in the meeting between Carmelita and the Virgin, as the Virgin calms her fears and prepares her for the future:

> VIRGIN. Hold your oars. Fate will have you meet your nemesis, Maldito, and when you do, you'll know what to do. As for the geshtunke brother of yours, you too will be reunited. Where was I? Oh, the revolution. Let it be your art. Your art is your weapon. To give dignity to Latin and Third World women: this is your struggle. If you accept, you will be gifted with eternal youth. You will always be as you are today, twenty-one.
>
> CARMELITA. Nineteen, please.
>
> VIRGIN. Okay, but you will suffer much. Spend years penniless and unknown until 1967.
>
> CARMELITA. That is a lot of years, but for nineteen is okay, I accept.
>
> VIRGIN. But listen, Carmelita, there is more. You must never, ever, ever…
>
> CARMELITA. What? You are killing me.
>
> VIRGIN. Or all the years will return, like to that nasty Dorian Gray.
>
> CARMELITA. Never do what?
>
> VIRGIN. Never let a man touch you. You must remain pure, like me.
>
> CARMELITA. Never let a man touch me. Believe me, to Carmelita Tropicana Guzmán Jiménez Marquesa de Aguas Claras, that is never to be a problem. (she winks) (Troyano *I, Carmelita Tropicana* 38).

The deal made with the Virgin, similar to a deal made with the devil, reads contradictory to Christian beliefs, and the possibility that god is really a goddess plays to the notions of lesbian as women-identified and some pre-Judeo-Christian religions.

Troyano/Tropicana also creates these incongruous juxtapositions through the Virgin's use of Yiddish. Troyano/Tropicana established multilingual conversations immediately in Spanish, then German, followed by Yiddish. The convention certainly reminds (and often frustrates) the spectator that English is not the universal language and, even within the United States, foreigners struggle with language and culture. She is also establishing another layered visualization for the spectator through the reminder that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, was a Jew. The stereotypical Jewish mother—a stock character in standup comedy and more traditional dramas, the overbearing, nosey, matchmaking, kibitzing, manipulative mother seen in routines from *Saturday Night Live*'s skits with Mike Myers to *Fiddler on the Roof* to *Seinfeld*—is now placed on Mary. Images of Mary verklempt over Jesus staying out too late, not interested in marrying a nice Jewish girl, certainly bring that relationship down to a tangible plane while also being a bit too ostentatious to be believed.

Finally, Troyano/Tropicana challenges the stereotypes of feminism and lesbianism as well as toying with virginal purity through the deal between the Virgin and Carmelita. She first plays to the heteronormative culture's hierarchy of sexuality, particularly the idea that President Clinton perfected: What, exactly, *is* sex? Mainstream feminism, at the time of this performance, wanted lesbianism to be pure—to represent women loving women, women caring for women. This was not a sexual lesbianism, instead it was a utopia created by heterosexual feminists. Troyano/Tropicana plays to the feminist ideologies and then immediate disrupts them with the wink at the end of the scene. She spoils the popular virgin/whore dynamic from its root, the Virgin Mary. This single gesture puts into question

the Virgin's sexuality while expressing her own, unveiling woman as sexual being regardless of commitment, choice, or desire.

Troyano/Tropicana's work is a clear example of the use of incongruous juxtapositions in lesbian camp. Her scenes are compact and dense, filled with visual and oral elements combining to simultaneously celebrate and demystify our notions of woman, lesbian, Latino/a, religion, and memory. Another slightly more complicated use of lesbian camp is displayed in Holly Hughes's 1993 production of *Clit Notes*. Hughes's use of lesbian camp in *Clit Notes* is more complex because it is a solo performance piece that does not concentrate on impersonations, preferring instead to use incongruous juxtapositions of hetero/homosexual imagery and butch-femme *genderfucking*.

Genderfucking, as defined by theorist June L. Reich, "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" (255). Read with Butler, it is political because of its radical disruption of the anatomical sex, sexuality, and gender paradigm. Genderfucking exposes the social construction and lack of unity within said paradigm. Genderfucking is an important element of lesbian camp because it simultaneously celebrates and dismantles the roles of the butch-femme couple (although it should be noted that genderfucking can happen outside the butch-femme coupling).

In *Clit Notes*, Hughes is working through her relationship with her father as well as her attraction to butch lovers (her femininity is made clear through her physical appearance on stage, as described earlier in this chapter, and self identification). While there is a physical absence of her butch partner, the lover is present through Hughes's expression of desire and specificity of language. Thus, even though it is a solo performance, Hughes establishes the

butch-femme coupling on stage. It is the desire for one another and her lover's masculine gender performativity that creates the genderfuck: "Putting on these men's clothes doesn't erase her woman's body. In fact, it almost makes it worse. And I'll tell you why. Her tits. They are just *relentless*. The way they just keep pushing through the white cotton like a pair of groundhogs drilling through the February snow to capture their own shadows" (*Clit Notes* 204). Her lover, with her men's jeans, men's underwear, and men's white cotton T-shirt is still very much a woman, and Hughes would not have it any other way.

The genderfuck is not merely the butch-femme couple that Hughes portrays; rather it is the lover's womanliness behind her masculine gender performativity. It is the genderfucking surrounding the butch-femme coupling that makes it camp and not the butch-femme couple itself. Hughes is disrupting not only the heteronormative unities of sex, sexuality, and gender, but also the unities of the butch-femme coupling through the tension between her lover's femininity and masculinity—her lover's breasts pushing through her white cotton shirt, the couple's lesbian desire, and their estranged contention between male/female and masculine/feminine.

Once Hughes establishes the genderfuck, she is able to explore the incongruous juxtaposition interpolated by heteronormative culture's reading and viewing of the butch-femme couple and tangible presence of the couple's needs and desires. With a performance somewhere between spectacle and certainty—amongst possibility and verity (in other words, what is truth within the biographical) Hughes then enters into the Polynesian world of the Hanalei:

> We checked into the best motel, the Hanalei. Polynesian from the word go. Outside a pink neon sign announces: A Taste of Aloha.

> You can taste it before you even check in.
>
> There's Styrofoam Easter Island heads everywhere. The bed's a volcano. Every night there's a luau. It's free, it's gratis. So of course we go. And I love the way they slip those pink plastic leis over your head. I just love that! I love the thought of those Day-Glo flowers blooming long after Jesse Helms is gone.
>
> I hope. (*Clit Notes* 208).

It is not only a holiday from verisimilitude but also an explicit escape from the dichotomous environments of normative culture's sex, gender, and sexuality systems (hetero/homo, masculine/feminine, male/female). The campiness of the Hanalei, with its simulations of simulations including Astroturf, the Caribbean piña coladas, plastic pineapples, Day-Glo flowers, and a Don Ho impersonator, allows Hughes to layer their bodies with incongruous meanings for the purpose of disrupting conventions in her own feminist and lesbian communities (as well as exposing the performativity within heteronormative culture). She exposes differences within the political and theoretical lives of the butch-femme couple with the tangible experiences of the couple; that is to say, the dynamics between politics/theory and practice—the multiplicity of experiences, desires, and needs—cannot always be affixed to the identity politic of feminists, lesbians, or heteronormativity. Camp then becomes an additional strategy for the butch-femme couple, as it seduces the system of signs, manipulating images, and wreaking havoc on so-called authenticity.

Hughes also uses camp as a situational strategy born from the homosexual love/hate of oneself. Camp uses incongruity, theatricality, and humor to expose homosexual stigma and shame, while defiantly celebrating all those things that normative culture finds

contemptible in the homosexual culture. In other words, Hughes uses lesbian camp, specifically the elements of genderfucking and hetero/homo juxtaposition, as a transitional language by which the lesbian community can entertain. To some extent, it is a coming-out party that concentrates on the *how* instead of the *what*: not what it is but how it looks, not what is done but how it is done. This should in no way be mistaken for simple distraction, nor should it be seen as the acceptance of western culture's label of moral deviant; instead, Hughes's lesbian camp should be seen as a product of the tension between the lesbian community and heterosexual normativity. *Clit Notes* provides an excellent example of this style of lesbian camp:

> In front of the Ukrainian meat market she pulls me to her, wraps her arms around me, her hands on my ass like the lucky claw at Coney Island, clamping tight and lifting up, and then I'm a candy necklace, a ring flashing secret messages. She gives me a slow deliberate kiss, her body bending over mine like I am a knot she is carefully untying. With her tongue.
>
> Behind us, in the window of the market, a blue and gold sign announces "We're Free!" in two languages. We stay deep in the kiss, as though the sign applied to us as well. And for a moment I'm so happy, I could be Ukrainian. (Hughes *Clit Notes* 205)

Here, Hughes first creates an image of desire, love, and sexuality using the quintessential boardwalk game, the lucky claw, embracing her queerness and literally letting it be exposed to the public. Hughes and her lover are wrapped in their desire for one another, feeling as free as a Ukrainian from the thumb of the USSR. This freedom comes with a sense of safety and security, and at the same time duels with the lesbian visibility/invisibility. As

with Hughes's earlier scene at the luau (Everybody's looking at us. But you can only see what you want to see. And what these folks want to see is not a couple of dykes making out at their luau. So that's not what they see. They start translating us into their reality . . . . They don't have any words for us, so they can't see us, so we're safe, right? [*Clit Notes* 208]), the butch-femme couple's ability to be read and/or viewed as lesbian/not-lesbian becomes simultaneously a tactic of necessity and a reification of cultural norm. Hughes is exposing these dichotomous and problematic tactics while also celebrating them. She is the candy in her lover's mouth, while at the same time she is invisible and extra-legal—not a comfortable position to navigate. Yet the discomfort explored is also exciting and annihilating: publicly embracing one's lesbian desire through a kiss or (re)turning the disassociation of heteronormativity back on culture (What they think they're seeing is Matt Dillon making out with a young Julie Andrews. A young Julie Andrews. Before *Victor/Victoria.*[*Clit Notes* 208]) camps the moment by focusing on the queerness of the situation rather than assimilating into a hierarchical power dynamic.

Then, with one word, she brings us back to our Otherness:

> Then a man whips out of the store. In his arms he's cradling a newborn baby ham. But passing us he names us, he calls us: *Shameless!*
>
> Could be that this sort of man who thinks anyone, gay—straight, or ambidextrous—kissing in public is shameless . . . meaning that hearts should stay tucked in the pants, hidden, not hung like fat sausages in the greasy public window.
>
> Or it could be that this is the sort of man who thinks that just the *thought* of me loving another woman, even if I never act on it, is a shameless act.
>
> I don't know what sort of man this is. But I wish what he said were true.

> I wish I had no shame.
>
> Maybe there are shameless queers. But I know that I'm not one of them, and neither is my girlfriend. I know that buried deep in our bodies is the shrapnel of memory dripping a poison called shame. (Hughes *Clit Notes* 205)

That one word—*shameless*—possesses our (queers') deepest fears, places barriers on our actions, and defines us; it is the embodiment of our relationships in and out of the norm. For Hughes, the incongruities exposed are between the personal and the theatrical; they are woven into her solo performances as they are into our lives. At times they are placed in direct tension with one another; at times they possess the power to control our actions, movements, thoughts—our lives—but at times they become points of celebration, both through annihilation and assimilation. Hughes, choosing a meat market with its sausages hanging in the window, plays not only on prurient, phallic imagery hanging behind the lesbian kiss, but also the (dis)use of the phallus in her genderfucking. In other words, lesbian camp is political, as it stresses the two worlds of hetero and homo with all of their baggage open for exploration, criticism, contempt, humor, and celebration. She goes on to say, "But we're the lucky ones. There's not enough shame in us to kill us. Just enough to feel it when it rains" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 205).

The validity of camp in lesbian performance is not secure. In her article, "Fe/Male Impersonations," Kate Davy denies camp's legitimacy in lesbian comedic practices. Davy uses Newton's definition of camp (incongruous juxtaposition), relying heavily on the masculine-feminine juxtapositions which Newton states are "of course, the most

characteristic kind of camp"("Role Models" 24).[11] Davy vigorously describes the subversive potential of drag in gay theater and its relationship to camp, while at the same time stating the problems such a discourse has within lesbian theater. Davy, while also speaking to the subversive potential of drag in gay theater, believes:

> Female impersonation, while it certainly says something about women, is primarily about men, addressed to men, and for men. Male impersonation has no such familiar institutionalized history in which women impersonating men say something about women. Both female and male impersonation foreground the male voice and, either way, women are erased. ("Fe/Male Impersonations" 133)

There are two parts to her problemitization of male and female impersonations: the history of male impersonation and female subjectivity in drag.

In her footnote to the above quote, Davy states that there is indeed a history of male impersonation from Queen Elizabeth to Vaudeville, and she asks the reader to engage Laurence Senelick's *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and the Theater*, a theoretical and historical study of drag. Yet, she does not accept a historical premise of women dragging for women.[12] Davy's critique of drag has long been established within second-wave feminism, especially the feminist models of culture that recognize hierarchies of power, in which the white heterosexual male holds most of the power. In the confines of a hierarchical engagement it becomes easy to see how men dragging women can be read as condescending and sexist:

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[11] It should be noted that she continued, "but any very incongruous contact can be campy" Esther Newton, "Role Models," *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) 24.

[12] And to be fair, Drag Kings have never achieved the same success as Drag Queens, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century. For further information please find: Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky Davis Madeline D. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold : The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge, 1993. and Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.

men dressing up as women (often the ideal Woman), but then being able to strip the makeup and clothing, revealing the Man underneath and exiting the venue as men with the rights and privileges afforded to them. Women, in Davy's terms, never establish a subjective role in or out of drag performance: "The female subject, on the other hand, is trapped in hegemonic discourses as "woman," the always already spoken-for construction that replaces women as speaking subjects in representation. . . . 'Woman' replaces women and marks their absence" (Davy "Fe/Male Impersonations" 142).

Of course, not all second wave feminists read drag or power in hierarchical terms. Shifting away from such readings, Judith Butler weighs in stating:

> The notion of an originality or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be . . . degrading to women. . . . But the relation between the "imitation" and the "original" is, I think more complicated than that critique allows. . . . As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. (*Gender Trouble* 137)

In other words, drag performance, while often working with iconic images of Man and Woman, actually tends to disrupt the seemingly essential connection of gender, sex, and sexuality. Additionally, through the performance of the imitation and the reveal, the drag king/queen explodes the myth of a stable masculine or feminine identity. To look at drag as merely a conversation between men (a critique I certainly advocated for quite some time) is

to look at only a single dimension of its function and the function of heteronormative culture. To look at drag from such an approach could also be seen as being homophobic, which is ridiculous when speaking about Davy, but proves the recuperative power of our culture and the homophobia within second-wave feminism.[13] Additionally, the argument that drag is only for and by gay men but centering around Woman (femininity and male to female transformation) reestablishes heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as lacking. Or as Sue Ellen Case states (regarding second-wave feminism), "the isolation of the social dynamics of race and class successfully relegates sexual preference to an attendant position, so even if the lesbian were to appear, she would be as a bridesmaid and never the bride" (Case "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 187).

But for Sue Ellen Case, there is a possibility for lesbian subjectivity as well as a place for camp within lesbian comedic performance. And while her 1988 article, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," is somewhat problematic, it is important to take a moment to explore how Case establishes lesbian subjectivity and the role of the butch-femme couple within the lesbian subjectivity because the article represents a steppingstone from which I can not only explore the possibilities of camp outside gay male performance and the differences between drag and the butch-femme couple, but also, more importantly, how performers like Split Britches actually complicate drag and butch-femme in their camp performances.

Case addressed the political potential of camp, specifically within lesbian performance. Here, she focused on creating a "feminist subject, endowed with the agency for political change, located among women, outside the ideology of sexual difference, and

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[13] The relationship between feminism and sexuality will be discussed in depth later when exploring lesbian comedic performances' effects on the feminist sex wars.

thus the social institution of heterosexual" ("Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 186). Her subject became the butch-femme couple. Case made a bold move in establishing the butch-femme couple as a feminist subject, creating the feminist lesbian paradox of invisibility/subjectivity. Case described this invisibility as "ghosting" of the lesbian subject within the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s where, "the lesbian has been assigned to the role of the skeleton in the closet of feminism" ("Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 186). And yet, she is using the butch-femme couple (driven by queer desires) and the politics of camp as tools to escape the heteronormative gaze.[14]

For Case, camp disassembles realist modes of performance through wit, irony, artifice, and instability, and in doing so exposes the narrative, language, status quo, and Truth as recuperative functions of a racist, homophobic, classist society. As with other strategies of the closet,[15] Case contends that "the camp success in ironizing and distancing the regime of realist terror mounted by heterosexist forces has become useful as a discourse and style for other marginal factions" ("Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 190). Camp as a style, she admits, has also become popular with the postmodern, heterosexual canon (think of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or *Flash Gordon*). But its popularity within these canons does not deter the influence camp has within the context of its performance; that is to say, the use of camp in postmodernism or "straight" performance still has the potential to undercut essentialist behavior in cultural institutions. I disagree with Case's use of "straight" camp. I do not believe camp is ever "straight," regardless of the performers' sexuality. My personal belief is that camp's strength and politics comes from its queerness: by this I mean camp's

[14] Chapter III will confront the gaze through lesbian camp.

[15] Strategies of the closet include: coming out, drag balls, and pride parades

ability to disrupt heteronormative cultural norms regardless of sexuality. So, while *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or *Flash Gordon* are popular among heterosexuals, they still work simultaneously within and out of popular culture's conventions and therefore they are neither "straight" nor are they prescriptive.

Case next describes the ways in which the butch-femme couple takes the position of subject. She begins with Joan Rivière's masquerade theory. Rivière was a psychoanalyst of the Freudian school. Her theory stems from a female patient's anxiety over the patient's behavior after presenting an academic paper in the early part of the twentieth century (Rivière wrote her paper in 1929). Rivière surmised that the patient's behavior was a masquerade of womanliness created subconsciously in order to atone for the castration of her father's penis. The intellectual prowess of the patient forced the masquerade in order to safely avoid recompense from her male colleagues and men in general. For Rivière, there is no tangible difference between the masquerade of womanliness and "genuine" womanliness.[16]

Case expands upon Rivière's theory, stating that the butch-femme couple consciously masquerades womanliness and, since there is no phallus located in the butch-femme relationship, castration becomes incongruous and foregrounded, giving way to subjectivity through the rejection of heteronormative desire and heteronormative gender performativity. Camp aids subjectivity through brandishing essentialist notions of gender through irony and excess. For Case, the butch-femme couple masquerades in and out of the theater. Butler's gender performativity is very similar to Rivière's theory of the

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[16] For more on Rivière's theories, please see: Rivière, Joan, "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *Gender: Readers in Cultural Criticism.* Ed. Anna Tripp. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000.

"masquerade." Butler's theory of gender performativity aids in the creation of the butch-femme couple as a feminist subject, especially when trying to establish the butch-femme couple outside of the heterosexual mimicry so often associated with this form of lesbianism. The gender categories of masculinity and femininity (similarly to drag) are disrupted at the biological level, creating the potential for a scratch in the normative gaze (Román). The scratch, then, creates an abandonment of "reality" both in an out of the theater.

Both Davy and Case have similar approaches to female subjectivity through the butch-femme couple. Davy, in actuality, builds from Case. Case believes that the butch-femme couple has the potential to use camp as strategy for lesbian subjectivity. Davy disagrees, stating that it is possible to use elements of camp but, "in the context of gay male theater and its venues, camp is indeed a means of signaling through the flames, while in lesbian performance it tends to fuel and fan the fire" ("Fe/Male Impersonation" 145). Neither Case nor Davy looked at how the butch-femme couple uses drag in their performances.[17] In fact, Davy spends a significant amount of time in her article describing the differences between the two, but not discovering the way in which the butch-femme couple has added drag to its repertoire. Butch-femme and drag are two completely different types of gender performance, and Troyano/Tropicana and Split Britches use drag to further complicate their gender performances as well as having the potential to disrupt the more difficult notion of sex as a cultural construct.

[17] Please note that my use of performance and performativity are not interchangeable. I define performance as a conscious dramatic act while performativity is used to describe occasions upon which we produce our gender. As stated earlier, gender performativity is not always a conscious or controlled act. Most often our gender performativities are formed at young ages cannot be pinpointed to a specific moment or conscious act in our lives. For more information on performativity, please look at the works of Judith Butler.

Butch-femme and drag produce different performative acts.[18] The drag performance is a conscious performance for an audience, whether it is at a party, bar, theater, or nightclub. In drag, there is an effort to transform the body into an alternatively gendered person. For the drag queen, it is a transformation from a man to Woman, and for the drag king, it is from woman to Man. Drag uses stereotypes to transform the body from one image to another. Both Woman and Man are hyper-gendered representations of our cultural idea of women and men through imitating or outright impersonation of popular icons: Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, Judy Garland, James Dean, Elvis, Marlon Brando. While drag is not always overtly political, it works simultaneously with "homage and parodic satire," where the performer "pays tribute to . . . while satirizing the consumable gaze of dominant . . . audience that create, sustain, manipulate, exploit, recycle, and even appropriate the stereotypical images"(Braziel 168). An excellent example of this is Troyano's transformation into Tropicana, where "no one is left off the hook: the ironic and sharp attacks on Cuban and Cuban American racism, sexism, and general hypocrisy are not retracted" (Muñoz "Choeto/Carmelita Tropicana" 44).

Additionally, drag intentionally creates a tension between the genders, with the performer often revealing his/her creation through the removal of wigs, revealing breasts, showing chest hair. This reveal is an important aspect of drag as the intention is not to become Woman or Man but to show Woman or Man. Because it is, as Butler says, a copy of a copy[19] (and a failed one at that) it becomes a site of humor. Drag also has the potential to

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[18] The incongruous visual character of the butch-femme coupling and drag produce a multiplicity of viewings, readings, and meanings. Therefore they "produce" rather than "are."

[19] See Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

expose the failure of the perceived unity among the sex, gender, and sexuality systems; that is to say, drag uses the tensions within the systems to expose the cultural constructedness of these entities with the aim of disrupting continuity among gender, sex, and sexuality (as example: masculine, heterosexual, women). Hughes transforms herself and her partner into a young Julie Andrews and Matt Dillon because "they don't have any words for us, so they can't see us" (*Clit Notes* 208).

But while drag has been popular within queer communities, the performers and audiences are not necessarily gay, lesbian or transgendered. Butch-femme performativities are useful in drag, especially when used to layer the performance of gender and sexuality that further complicates the performance. Gender, sex, and sexuality become unstable as the butch and/or femme become hybrids embodying multiple points of desire, "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" (Reich 264).

The butch-femme couple differs from drag in many ways. First, the couple does not perform gender for entertainment or the enlightenment of others; instead it is an erotic system of codes meant to signify desire, a lesbian desire. Therefore, while the butch-femme couple uses gender play to signal its sexual expression, there is no distinction between an inner/outer woman—no gender transformation.[20] The butch-femme couple does not employ theatricality within its performativity (typically no facial hair) and consequently the couple has the potential to pass within heteronormative culture (the butch as a man, and the femme as a heterosexual woman). The possibility of passing often translates gender, even

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[20] Esther Newton's "Dick(less) Tracy and the Homecoming Queen: Lesbian Power and Representation in Gay Male Cherry Grove" explores the historic relationship between lesbian butch-femme and lesbian drag. The article can be found in: Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

within lesbian communities, as inherent, especially since, unlike drag, the butch and femme gender performances are not layered and tend to remain constant throughout the individuals' lives. But Joan Nestle reminds us that "lesbians should be mistress of discrepancies, knowing that resistance lies in the change of context" ("The Femme Question" 141). In other words, "where sex and gender, biology and gender presentation, fail to match . . . where appearance and reality collide," we find the butch-femme couple expressing its desires through erotic gender performances that also disrupt the unity among sex, sexuality, and gender (Halberstam *Female Masculinity* 126).

But the disruption of sex, sexuality, and gender does not necessarily translate into camp. The masquerade Case established for the butch-femme couple is one of womanliness, which, through the mutual presence of butch and femme, upsets the basic notions of Woman, and not as Case states, "butch-femme roles offer a hypersimulation of woman as she is defined by the Freudian system and the phallocracy that institutes its social rule" ("Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetci" 197). Hypersimulation is a performance technique that the butch-femme couple uses as an additional layer to its butch and femme engendered bodies, meaning that the butch-femme couple can use techniques like drag in addition to its nonmatrixed[21] presentation in order to expose its own gender performance as well as heteronormative convictions of Woman. Techniques like drag performance in addition to the butch-femme performativity produce multiple layers of gender transformation and have

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[21] I first ran into the term nonmatrixed while reading Michael Kirby's "On Acting and Not-Acting, where he described it as, "performers who do not do anything to reinforce the information or identification" *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli. New York: Routledge, 2002, page 41. I am recycling the term nonmatrixed to describe the presentation of gender within the butch-femme couple. The butch-femme couple is not a performer in the theatrical sense. The couple is as Judith Butler states in *Bodies that Matter*, "[reiterating] a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like-status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (12).

the potential to bring the ultimate genderfuck to performance. Camp can then be found in these multiple layers of excess, using and abusing the tensions created between woman, butch-femme, and masculine/ feminine.

Take, for example, Split Britches *Belle Reprieve*, where Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw (butch-femme couple) performed a tribute to/of Tennessee Williams's *A Street Car Named Desire* with London's gay duo, the Bloolips. The production was created with the iconography of the 1951 Elia Kazan film with Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalksi and Vivien Leigh as Blanche DuBois. The character breakdown for the Split Britches production is as follows: Paul Shaw as Mitch, Lois Weaver as Stella, Peggy Shaw as Stanley, and Bette Bourne as Blanche.

Toward the end of the production, with Mitch playing the ukulele and the other members of the company tap dancing inside Chinese lantern costumes, Blanche interrupts:

> BLANCHE. Oh, what are we doing? I can't stand it! I want to be in a real play! With real scenery! White telephones, French windows, a beginning, a middle, and an end! This is the most confusing show I've ever been in. What's wrong with red plush? What's wrong with a themes and a plot we can follow? There isn't even a fucking drinks trolley. Agatha Christie was right.
>
> STELLA. Now we all talked about this, and we decided that realism works against us.
>
> BLANCHE. Oh we did, did we?
>
> STELLA, STANLEY, AND MITCH. Yes we did!
>
> BLANCHE. But I felt better before, I could cope. All I had to do was learn my lines and not trip over the furniture. It was all so clear. And here we are romping

about in the avant-garde and I don't know what else. I want my mother to come and have a good time. She's seventy-three for chrissake. You know she's expecting me to play Romeo before it's too late. What am I suppose to tell her? That I like being a drag-queen? She couldn't bear it. I know she couldn't. She wants me to be in something realistic, playing a real person with a real job, like on television.

STELLA. You want realism?

BLANCHE. What do you mean?

STELLA. You want realism, you can have it.

BLANCHE. You mean like a real play?

STELLA. If that's what you want.

BLANCHE. With Marlon Brando and Vivien Leigh?

STELLA. You think you can play it?

BLANCHE. I have the shoulders.

STANLEY. I have the pajamas… okay, let's go for it. (Case *Split Britches* 178-9)

Here the company steps out of the performance. As a popular drag performer, Bourne takes the wig off, so to speak, exposing his desire to please his mother and prove his success in a more traditional genre—television or realist theater. He wants to be able to bring his mother to one of his performances, but that does not seem possible when he is in drag. He rejects himself, his sexuality, and his community.

At the same time, both Bourne and Peggy Shaw re-engage their characters, returning to their drag positions of Blanche and Stanley. There is no intention from Peggy Shaw or Bourne to play their roles as a woman or a man. *Belle Reprieve* isn't a performance where the

actors seek to become their characters. They wear their characters the way we wear our clothes—they are dragging their characters. This becomes clearer as the scene continues with Stanley sweeping the table clear:

> STANLEY. I cleared my place, want me to clear yours? It's just you and me now, Blanche.
>
> BLANCHE. You mean we're alone in here?
>
> STANLEY. Unless you got someone in the bathroom. (*He takes off his pajama top and pulls out a bottle of beer*)
>
> BLANCHE. Please don't get undressed without pulling the curtain.
>
> STANLEY. Oh, this is all I'm gonna undress right now. Feel like a shower? (*He opens the beer and shakes it, then lets it squirt all over the stage, then pours some over his head before drinking it*) You want some?
>
> BLANCHE. No thank you.
>
> STANLEY. (*moving towards her, menacingly*) Sure I can't make you reconsider?
>
> BLANCHE. Keep away from me. (Case *Split Britches* 179)

The scene provides a constant shifting of identity formations: man, woman, male, female, drag, butch, and femme. It begins with Peggy Shaw in drag, albeit in pajamas, as Stanley à la Marlon Brando. Bourne is wearing an older party dress, also in drag. The first transformation takes place when Peggy Shaw takes off the pajama top, exposing the white "wife beater" tank top underneath. S/he is not wearing a bra or other banding type clothing under the tank top and therefore breasts are clearly visible through the shirt. As s/he showers herself and the stage with beer, symbolizing Stanley's drunkenness, s/he further exposes herself as a woman through the now-wet tank top. The layers of Shaw as woman,

Shaw as butch, and Shaw as Stanley are exposed, creating a complex atmosphere of mixed desires and fear.

S/he moves aggressively toward Blanche, taunting while physically blocking Blanche from further movement. Combining seduction and repulsion, Stanley/Shaw asks, "What queen do you think you are?" and not "What kind of queen do you think you are?" The dropping of "kind" changes the meaning of the statement from a want-to-be princess/queen to drag queen. It is said so quietly one almost misses it in performance, except the audience doesn't and neither does Blanche/Bourne. Blanche/Bourne continues to try to pass Stanley/Shaw, dropping character and reentering character quickly. A new power dynamic between the two emerges as Shaw, a woman, continues to block Bourne, the man, from exiting the stage and the performance. The narrative, now in full swing, possesses the spirit of Williams's script:

> STANLEY. What's the matter, don't you trust me? Afraid I might touch you or something? You should be so lucky. Take a look at yourself in that worn-out party dress from a third-rate thrift store. What queen do you think you are?
>
> BLANCHE. (*trying to get past him*) Oh God.
>
> STANLEY. *(blocking her exit)* I got your number baby.
>
> BLANCHE. Do we have to play this scene?
>
> STANLEY. You said that's what you wanted
>
> BLANCHE. But I didn't mean it.
>
> STANLEY. You wanted realism
>
> BLANCHE. Just let me get by you
>
> STANLEY. Get by me? Sure, go ahead

BLANCHE. You stand over there.

STANLEY. You got plenty of room, go ahead

BLANCHE. Not with you over there! I've got to get by somehow!

STANLEY. You can get by, there's plenty of room. I won't hurt you. I like you. We're in this together, me and you. We've known that from the start. We're the extremes, the stereotypes. We are as far as we can go. We have no choice, me and you. We've tried it all, haven't we? We've rejected ourselves, not trusted ourselves, mirrored ourselves, and we always come back to ourselves. We're the warriors. We have an agreement . . . there's plenty in this world for both of us. We don't have to give each other up anymore. You are my special angel.

BLANCHE. You wouldn't talk this way if you were a real man.

STANLEY. No, if I was a real man I'd say, "Come to think of it, you wouldn't be so bad to interfere with." (Case *Split Britches* 179-80)

As Blanche/Bourne begs Stanley/Shaw to move away, Stanley/Shaw continues to close the physical gap; this is when Stanley/Shaw begins the short monologue on stereotypes and extremes. Is it Stanley speaking to Blanche? Are they the same person, extreme in their existence? We know it is Bourne and Shaw, the effeminate gay man and the butch woman, easily recognizable as queer in and out of their communities; they are the visible warriors of the gay and lesbian equal rights movements—the first to be identified, first to be discriminated against. There is no passing for the likes of Shaw and Bourne, but neither is there for the likes of Stanley and Blanche.

Additionally, Stanley/Shaw speaks to Blanche/Bourne ("We don't have to give each other up to anyone. You are my special angel") as a collaborator, friend, character, and

activist. It is simultaneously touching and grotesque. As an activist, friend, and collaborator, Peggy Shaw is (re)affirming a coalition for action, friendship, and shared artistic goals. With similar ambitions but differing influences, Peggy Shaw as a lesbian may have been reminding Bourne as a gay man that lesbian and gay communities have enough in common to work together for equal rights; as a friend and collaborator, that these shared projects are important artistic endeavors. As Stanley, the meaning becomes more debased and corrupt as he takes Blanche's subjectivity, taking ownership through his words and actions:

> BLANCHE. And if I were really Blanche I'd say, "Stay back… don't come near me another step… or I'll…"
>
> STANLEY. You'll what?
>
> BLANCHE. Something's gonna happen here. It will.
>
> STANLEY. What are you trying to pull?
>
> BLANCHE. (*pulling off one of her stiletto-heeled shoes*) I warn you… don't!
>
> STANLEY. Now what did you do that for?
>
> BLANCHE. So I could twist this heel right in your face.
>
> STANLEY. You'd do that, wouldn't you?
>
> BLANCHE. I would, and I will if you…
>
> STANLEY. You want to play dirty, I can play dirty. (*He grabs her arm*) Drop it. I said drop it! Drop the stiletto!
>
> BLANCHE. You think I'm crazy or something?
>
> STANLEY. If you want to be in this play you've got to drop the stiletto.
>
> BLANCHE. If you want to be in this play you've got to make me!

STANLEY. If you want to play a woman, the woman in this play gets raped and goes crazy in the end.

BLANCHE. I don't want to get raped and go crazy. I just wanted to wear a nice frock, and look at the shit they've given me! (Case *Split Britches* 179-81)

The rape between Stanley and Blanche is estranging and at the same time ironic. And while the audience never sees the rape on stage (it is interrupted by a Stella and Mitch entering for the final musical number, *Pushover*), the moments leading up to Blanche/ Bourne's "I don't want to get raped and go crazy. I just wanted to wear a nice frock," grapple with such contradictory pairings as a lesbian penetrating an unwilling gay man. The rape scene is titillating in its simultaneous use of violence and genderfucking. The fluid shifts between actor and character throughout the scene betrays the often-perceived homogeneity between gender, sexuality, and anatomical sex. Through the deliberate mixing of character and actor, the act of rape becomes obscured, diffusing the narrative while at the same time emphasizing the nefarious nature of rape. Shaw's identities of lesbian, butch, along with her character Stanley established throughout the production, are placed in tension with Bourne's identities of gay, man, drag queen, and Blanche. The rape is superimposed upon each of these layers and is not necessarily read in binary opposition. The effect becomes humorous, as each of their unpredictable identities in tension is exposed: the fuchsia stiletto, the wet tank top, or a drag queen just wanting to wear a pretty dress.

Lesbian camp tends to make its politics clear, even if the politics are complicated, contextual, and/or incongruous. In *Belle Reprieve*, a woman attacks a man with a high heel. It is simultaneously empowering and ludicrous: empowering because here is a person using the tools at hand to protect him/herself; and ludicrous because the stiletto heel is a statement of

haute culture, of Woman. But the identity—Woman—is manipulated, confused, and de/reconstructed. In *Clit Notes*, dripping with sexual desire and lesbian feminist chutzpah, camp becomes a strategy to demystify, problematize, and expose the reading of, the (in)visibility of, and the safety of the butch-femme couple; and Troyano/Tropicana's camp of incongruous juxtaposition and drag draws upon her memories to tell the (hi)stories of Cuba and Cuban Americans.

Lesbian camp is not unique in its form and function to other types of camp: gay camp, postmodern camp, feminist camp, Latino/a camp, or even Susan Sontag's camp.[22] Lesbian camp, while focusing on incongruous juxtapositions and genderfucking (most often exploring genderfucking within butch-femme roles) maintains a dialogue with other camp forms. Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana as well as others at the WOW Café, "reached back into the gendered and dramatic world of butch-femme and across to the camp theater artists like Charles Ludlam with which butch-femme was most compatible" (Newton "Dick[less] Tracy" 89). It is important to remember that lesbian camp, while often revolving around butch-femme roles, uses genderfucking and incongruous juxtapositions to dissect and celebrate differences within the systems of gender, sexuality, and anatomical sex. Also, the WOW performers used lesbian camp to explore butch-femme roles and (as will be examined in Chapter IV) the butch-femme roles' relationships within the feminist and gay and lesbian movement. Camp as a strategy is one of the ways in which the lesbian and gay communities as well as Others can create a space to liberate desires, cultures, sexualities, language, and identities from the mores of United States society.

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[22] Two books I would highly recommend for further study in camp are: Fabio Cleto, "Introduction: Queering the Camp," *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999). and Moe Meyer, *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

CHAPTER III

LESBIAN SPECTATORSHIP AND SUBJECTIVITY

My first experience seeing Holly Hughes perform was in the fall of 1994. I was a third-year student at Wells, a small women's liberal arts college in upstate New York. I had read *World Without End*, her first full-length solo performance, and performed a monologue from it during the previous semester's acting class. It was a struggle for me to bring Hughes to campus, as the administrators were in an uproar because of her National Endowment for the Arts troubles, specifically her homosexual content in *World Without End*.[23] Additionally, Hughes could only play the date that had been established for Mother's Weekend, a long-standing Wells tradition where the mothers of the seniors came to campus for the weekend. The thought of a "pornographic radical feminist lesbian" as *the* event to attend was not what many had in mind. Nonetheless, we (the students) moved forward in our quest to bring Hughes to campus, where she performed *Clit Notes* in front of a packed house of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and mothers.

As the performance ended, not only did Hughes receive a standing ovation, but as the audience left the theater, mothers and daughters, professors, students, and administrators continued the conversation Hughes had begun and did not stop even after she returned to

[23] Interestingly enough, Hughes's *Well of Horniness* was censored this April (2009) at the College of Staten Island; fifteen years later and Hughes's work is still poignant. (Jim Dwyer, "Offstage, a Farce Gets a Second Act," *New York Times* 19 April 2009.)

New York City. *Clit Notes* became a catalyst on campus for discourses (re)considering feminism, lesbianism, and censorship, in the academy and society. If this single invitation could (re)invigorate our small community, imagine, I thought, what the WOW Café must have done for its community of feminists and lesbians.

This early experience with lesbian camp is my inspiration for this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the ways in which lesbian camp actualizes an activated spectatorship. I begin by defining activated spectatorship. Next, I detail the physical and social components of the WOW Café and explore how the Café's atmosphere aided in the development of lesbian camp. I explore theoretical concepts surrounding the relationship between performer(s) and spectator(s), specifically: the ways in which subjectivity is achieved and represented; how lesbian camp disrupts heteronormative reading and viewing practices; and lesbian camp's disidentificatory practices. Lastly, I apply Hughes's *Well of Horniness* and Split Britches' *The Beauty and the Beast* to said theoretical concepts.

Theorist Helena Grehan defines activated spectatorship as, "not in the sense that spectators might leap out of their seats and become politically active, but in the sense that they can become intrigued, engaged, and involved in the process of consideration and what these might mean both within and beyond the performance space" (5). While I believe that lesbian camp is political, I agree with Grehan's definition of activated spectatorship, focusing more on the following three elements rather than the overtly political activity that may be promoted through performance, protest, and other political representations. These elements are: (1) an engagement with the material, specifically the involvement of oneself in the interpretation of meaning; (2) participation in the creation of a community, even if only for the time encompassing the performance; and (3) partaking with the performance as

something more than a consumer—engaging the performance intellectually and emotionally with the potential of reading and viewing the performance from more than one *standpoint*.[24] Lesbian camp endeavors to incite an activated spectatorship through (1) the disruption of heteronormative reading and viewing practices, (2) the disruption of identity and identity politics, and (3) the exposure of gender, sexuality, and sex as gender constructs. These elements are present in the performances at the WOW Café throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. What follows is a brief history of the Company – its physical and social composition as well as its development of a lesbian and feminist community – in order to introduce the ways in which lesbian camp grew from concrete circumstances and those concrete circumstances can assist in the development of an activated spectatorship.

The WOW Café is an extraordinary venue. Its history will be detailed by Kate Davy in her soon-to-be released book, *Lady Dicks and Lesbian Brothers: Staging the Unimaginable at the WOW Cafe Theater*. Undoubtedly, Davy will chronicle the Café's early years: the excitement, the makeup of the community, the transition from an annual festival to a performance venue. What I would like to focus on is how lesbian camp, developed at the WOW Café, creates an activated spectatorship inside and out of the *lesbian ghetto*. [25] Both Kate Davy in

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[24] A standpoint as defined in feminism is a political, social, or economic epistemic position that comes directly from differences within social location or, as feminist theorist Nancy Hartsock states, "A standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but it is interested in the sense of being engaged. . . . A standpoint, however carries with it the contention that there are some perspectives on society which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible." Nancy C Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Round for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," *The Feminist Standpoint Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004) 36-37. Therefore, in order to read/view a performance from more than one standpoint, I am acknowledging a non-hierarchical form of reading and viewing that compels the spectators to recognize their contradictions and multiplicities of locations that reside politically, socially, and economically.

[25] The term lesbian ghetto, or gay ghetto, refers to particular sections of large cities where lesbians or gay men tend to live and congregate. In New York City, especially in the 1980s, lesbians tended to populate the SoHo district while gay men lived and played in Greenwich Village. Ghetto therefore is queered due its *usage*

"Cultural Memory and the Lesbian Archive" and Alisa Solomon in "The WOW Café" emphasized the energy and excitement surrounding the WOW festivals of 1980 and 1981: "On the face of it . . . WOW's festivals were not particularly unique. Yet women with disparate backgrounds and experiences concur that there was a felt *something* that made WOW's festivals terribly special" (Davy "Cultural Memory and the Lesbian Archive" 129). Momentum had built from the festival, and many of the participants from the festival wanted to continue the performances and the atmosphere that the festivals had created.

The WOW Café was formed as a women's performance collective over a series of Sunday brunches. Artists, designers, technicians, and spectators from the WOW festivals came together to create a year-round festival of women's work. The founders and participants in the Café had little money, but what they lacked in financial stability they made up for in creativity. The Café raised its funds through benefits and theme parties, with motifs such as the Freudian Slip, the Debutante Ball, the X-Rated Christmas, Medical Drag Ball, Butch-Femme Affairs, A Trucker's Ball (paying homage to Lawrence Welk), and the God Ball (come as your favorite saint or deity). The Café's first physical location was at 330 East 11th and was named "WOW at 330," depicting not only its venue address but also "the hour, as Weaver puts it, 'when girls get out of school and go out looking for fun'" (Solomon "The WOW Café" 95).

WOW at 330 was a simple space: ten feet wide by twenty feet long; a single window storefront with a small platform at the back of the space used as the stage; and room for approximately twenty-five folding chairs, depending upon the production. The box office

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betwixt its historic connotations (which are very much a part of its usage) and its visibility (allowing for a physical cultural center).

was a table located towards the entrance and publicity was typically word-of-mouth or fliers hung in the storefront's window. Kate Davy described one of her first experiences at WOW as "casual": "Some of the performers sit in the audience and enter for their scenes from these seats. At one point a performer exits down the aisle to a space near the ticket table behind the audience. Hearing rustling noises back there, some spectators turn around and see this performer near-naked in the process of changing her costume" ("Heart of the Scorpion" 56). The casualness at the WOW Café is fairly consistent with its unpredictable schedule, homemade technical equipment (the light board was a series of house dimmers, lighting instruments were cans with outdoor lamps, and audio equipment was whatever someone could donate from home), open membership, and the WOW's open and inclusive policy of performing/producing (if the space was free, anyone could use it for performances, film presentations, visual art displays). But WOW's casualness stemmed from its community and collectivity.

In an interview with Alisa Solomon, founding member Lois Weaver states, "The WOW Café is community theater in the best sense—it's creating theater of, for and by the community" ("The WOW Café" 101). Weaver and Peggy Shaw taught acting classes that the majority of the collective would participate in and assumed, "you came to WOW looking for two things: pussy and a place to perform" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 15). WOW was a place for women to congregate, mainly around the visual and performing arts, but it was also a place to take retreat: "after all, we advertised ourselves as a home for wayward girls" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 14). With an audience capacity the size of a dinner party, the lack of publicity or regular reviews, and its "anything goes" attitude, the WOW's spectatorship was primarily comprised

of members of its collective. Performances were intimate and the spectators rewarded the performers with "wild excitement" (Kron).

WOW Café's relationship between spectator, community, and performance was symbiotic. Women—significantly, lesbians—came to the Café looking for other lesbians. Lesbian visibility, lesbian identifications, and lesbian desires seduced individuals "who had never seen themselves reflected [on stage]" (Kron). Rather than bringing a community together for an event, the WOW Café's community created events out of necessity (rent parties), pride (theme parties), and artistic expression (performances, exhibits, and viewings). Hughes remembers, "Performance happens almost by accident, as by-products of the theme parties" (*Clit Notes* 15).

In their introductions to their *Sapphic Samplers*, both Hughes and Troyano/Tropicana describe their participation at the WOW as fluid: at various times they worked the door; performed in one another's pieces; wrote, directed, or performed their own work; and Hughes even acted as WOW's manager (an unpaid position). The fluidity materialized from and strengthened its community and performances, and provided an audience invested in the performances and in the WOW community. The combination of community and theater at the WOW Café created an environment ripe for an activated spectatorship.

The WOW Café's activated spectatorship differs from other venues, even similar venues in the same neighborhood (La MAMA Experimental Theater Club, Performance Space 122, The Kitchen, or Dixon Place). As stated earlier, the WOW Café's audience is its community. Unlike places such as the Metropolitan Opera or even La MAMA, where the spectators' relationship to the performance is stable and easily definable as, "one who is present at, and has a view or sight of, anything in the nature of a show or spectacle" (OED),

community members at the Café have a multiplicity of relationships to one another. Never truly "just spectators," members of the audience engage the productions—the genres, the performers, the themes—because they are immersed in the culture, the language, and representation constructed in the performances. Therefore, whether it is conversation over coffee and melted brie sandwiches, remarks between costume changes, or discussions pre- and post- performance, Troyano/Tropicana, in her interview with David Román, remembers, "one of the things I loved most about these early years at WOW is that we, that is lesbians, were able to come up with our own representations and have fun with them in the process. We had fights around these topics but we were always committed to supporting each other's work" (87). And by supporting, Troyano/Tropicana meant, "People will be critical of your work . . . but they'll criticize in a positive way that's helpful when you go out to perform in the other theater world" (Solomon "The WOW Café" 101).

It was not difficult for WOW artists to engage their audiences; their audiences had a vested interest in the performance. As WOW member and actor Lisa Kron states, WOW offered, "shows in which you could fall in love with the characters and the actors and not have to think, 'what if she was a lesbian?' They were all lesbians. At WOW even the women who weren't lesbians were lesbians" (www.lisakron.com). This exceptional—protective and critical, familiar—relationship between the spectator and performer certainly influenced the development of lesbian camp in and out of the WOW Café. The community at WOW assumed lesbian representation on the stage; they expected exploration of lesbian and feminist identifications through non-heteronormative theatrical approaches. As Kron stated, everyone at WOW was presumed lesbian; therefore, performance need not explore the

process of discovering one's sexuality or coming out. Enter lesbian camp with its iconic images, multiplicity of identifications, and genderfucking.

WOW provided lesbian camp two important mechanisms that aided in its development: an intimate performance space and community. The community often set the tone and content of the production. Holly Hughes wrote *The Well of Horniness* on a dare; Alina Troyano developed her persona, Carmelita Tropicana, as she nervously stepped onto stage into a role she thought she could never play; and Split Britches used performances at WOW to continually refine their work. Additionally, the intimate performance space at WOW did not allow for physical boundaries between performer and spectator. Imagine, if you will, dancing crustaceans or six Tropicanettes with large fruit attached to their rears, dancing and singing to *Yes We Have No Bananas* in a two hundred square foot performance space. The spectators' senses are on overdrive—seeing everything (even quick changes behind the ticket table), smelling everything, feeling everything; they are enveloped by the production.

But while lesbian camp was developed and refined at the WOW Café, it did not remain at the WOW Café for long. Performance Space 122 commissioned a Hughes/Split Britches collaboration, *Dress Suits to Hire* and Troyano/Tropicana's *Milk of Amnesia/Leche Amnesia*, and Hughes's *World Without End.* La MAMA and Women's Interart presented lesbian camp performances like *Dress Suits to Hire, Anniversary Art,* and *Belle Reprieve*, as well as Troyano/Tropicana's *Boiler Time Machine.* Hughes's Productions toured and/or accepted artists in residence at academic institutions as small as Wells College and as large as the University of Michigan. Additionally, the performers and productions could be found touring venues in the United States and Europe, such as Highways Performance Space and

Gallery, Yale Repertory Theater, Beacon Street Gallery, St. Marcus Theater (St. Louis), Woolly Mammoth Theater Company (Washington, DC), Curtains Theater (Houston), Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Brava! For Women in the Arts, Centre de Cultura Contemporania de Barcelona, the Orill Arts Center (London), and Tanzquartier (Vienna). Hughes, in an interview with Rebecca Schneider, admits, "I feel really strongly about putting lesbian work out. I want to make it as kinky, dirty, specifically women-oriented—as true to myself as I can make it. But I really feel like I don't want to preach to the converted. I really feel that it's very important for women's work to be seen in a more general context" (176). Lisa Kron concurs: "We learned then that part of the responsibility for bringing lesbian work to a larger audience lay with us. We would have to learn to open ourselves to these opportunities and set aside the fear that if we dare to reach for more we would be once again dismissed as being incapable of conveying anything of work or interest to those that count" ("A Straight Mind"). It is important to understand that while the WOW Café was an important space for the artists producing and performing lesbian camp, lesbian camp did not exist solely in the lesbian ghetto. Many of the artists at the WOW Café enjoyed the safety a segregated community can provide, especially while developing a production, but they also clearly wished to perform for larger communities.

The relationships between lesbian camp and the communities outside the lesbian ghetto are more complex. Feminist performance critics like Sue Ellen Case, Jill Dolan, Elin Diamond, Lynda Hart, and Kate Davy have ruminated over questions of lesbian representation, specifically questions of assimilation and annihilation. One instance, leading to a very public disagreement between lesbian feminist critic Sue Ellen Case and Holly Hughes, will be discussed in Chapter IV; it is valuable to look at how lesbian camp confronts

heteronormative reading and viewing practices, especially since I believe that lesbian camp works to disrupt these practices for the purposes of creating an activated spectatorship.

As argued in Chapter II, I believe that lesbian camp leaves no spectator behind. Previously, I stated that lesbian camp coerces its spectators into leaving their baggage at the door. For that to happen, lesbian camp performers must find ways in which their different—and diverse—audiences can form "identification with" the material. Identification *with* the material differs from identifying *as* the performer or performance subject. The former leaves the (con)text open for multiple interpretations, stemming from a multiplicity of viewpoints, while the latter asks for the spectator to place his/herself "in the shoes" (so to speak) of the performer. Identification *with* changes the perspective of the subject. It leads to the potential to actively engage in one's environment through bypassing the "I am" and replacing it with "I see." Lesbian camp tends to succeed in the transformation from unoccupied objectivity to impelling dialogue among spectators and performers. Lesbian campers do this through the dismantling of identity and identity politics; the disruption of heteronormative viewing and/or reading practices; and the exposure of gender, sexuality, and sex as social constructs. The result tends to be "a window into a world that is both my own and not my own" (Miller "Preaching to the Converted" 185). That is, empathy[26] is not the desired affect in lesbian camp – especially from its more diverse audiences; rather, what is solicited is the disruption of heteronormative culture's mores, politics, sexuality, identificatory practices.

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[26] The OED defines empathy as, "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation." *Oxford English Dictionary [electronic resource]*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000–. However, what is more important is that requires a shared identity—a personal connection—whereas identification *with* the material or character does not. Identification *with* is simultaneously accessible and political in its ability to form a community for the occasion.

The relationship between performer(s) and spectator(s) in lesbian camp presumes a multiplicity of subjectivities, and feminist film theorists have more often explored the relationship of the spectator to the performance (specifically subjectivity/objectivity and representation) than feminist theater critics have. Feminist theorists in film and theater (both Kate Davy and Sue Ellen Case used film theorist Teresa de Lauretis's article, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," to support their discourses on lesbian subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter II) have explored gaze theory as one way in which to analyze subject/object relationships between spectators and performers. Of course, film and theater differ in many regards—film's performance is established without an audience while the spectator in theater is "involved in the making of the play" (Bennett 21)—but there are also some important similarities between spectatorship in film (specifically the viewing of film at the theater) and spectatorship in theater. Both make the performance available for a distinct time period (there is no rewind); both involve the creation of a community (the audience), even if just for the occasion of the film or performance (the viewing and/or reading experience will differ each occasion because of the makeup of the audience); and both traditionally set the role of the spectator as passive viewer or voyeur (individuals sit in a dark house looking at a lighted screen or lighted stage). Therefore, it is important to take a moment to develop the gaze as one way in which to better understand lesbian camp's relationship between spectators and performers.

Feminist film theorists, art historians, and philosophers in the 1970s and 1980s used French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's account of the mirror stage—its relationship to the

body-image[27]—as the basis for their analyses of reading and viewing practices. Early (re)considerations of reading and viewing practices created the term "male gaze," for which film theorist Laura Mulvey (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 1975) has been credited. Simply stated, the male gaze has been defined as the patriarchal point of view from which the visual and performing arts are viewed and/or read. The concept of the male gaze encouraged places like the WOW Café. Places like the Café were considered safe: safe to explore non-heteronormative art forms, safe to engage alternative material, safe to express oneself in a specific environment. The early feminist interpretation of the male gaze was hierarchical in its understanding: "The images of woman (as passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form—illusionistic narrative film" (Mulvey 38). Feminist film theory became a necessity for feminist theater artists, especially those interested in disrupting heteronormative reading and viewing practices.

More recently, feminist reconsiderations have also examined the structures of power alongside the visual framework. Feminist and queer theorists have continued Mulvey's work, interpreting the gaze not in terms of hierarchy, but rather as an open apparatus. This shift in thinking establishes subjectivity differently, allowing for subjectivity to reside not only within the male/masculine/patriarchal viewer, but also potentially within all viewers as well as the performer. Film theorist and critic Kaja Silverman defined the gaze as that which "confirms and sustains the subject's identity, but it is not responsible for the form which that identity assumes; it is merely the imaginary apparatus through which light is projected onto the

[27] For a more in-depth discussion, please read: Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. New York: Norton, 1977.

subject" (*Male Subjectivity* 145). In other words, the metaphor of the camera and its framing of an image represents the gaze. The gaze is active in that it is in the presence of others rather than the hierarchical take on the gaze as voyeuristic (the person looking through the key hole); it is infused with the recognition of seeing and being seen as well as impregnated with identification. Film theorist Todd McGowan explains further: "The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back. The gaze thus involves the spectator in the image, disrupting her/his ability to remain all-perceiving and unperceived in the cinema"(28-29).

The gaze manages cultural competency, desire, and identification rather than strict models of subjectivity based on the hierarchical patriarchy. The danger in the gaze, as in the Foucaultian Panopticon model, is that an institutionalized gaze[28] (in many cases a heteronormative gaze) perpetuates a certain type of behavior. However, the gaze is always contextual and often contradictory; it is at the sites of context and contradiction where lesbian camp has the ability to disrupt the panoptical effect of the normative gaze in order to transform and exploit the image(s) for camp's performers' own ambition(s).

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[28] At this point I must interrupt and state that as a queer and a feminist, I am stuck betwixt between the theories of subjectivity and power as (de)constructed by Foucault and other postmodernists, and the modernist leaning of feminist discourses closely associated with United States activism. In other words, I struggle with the relationship between individual and institutional power dynamics, the place of subjectivity within institutions and individuals, and where the potential for resistance and freedom lies. With a little help from theorists and feminists like Sonia Kruks, Biddy Martin, and Minnie Bruce Pratt, I have taken a hybrid approach: I do believe, as does Foucault, that power comes from below and that this power renders the body active. This active body possesses agency/subjectivity through its relationship with culture. This active body or individual can look as well as be looked at. Resistance and freedom inhabit this active body, as does responsibility. However, I also believe that there are "socially distinct groups [that] are differently positioned within generalized networks of power that Foucault does not recognize." (Kruks, Sonia. *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001 (60)). These networks have become institutionalized (as perhaps feminism and queer studies have in the academy). Heteronormative culture is a culmination of these institutions, and it (culture) uses the strategies of these institutions as tools to recuperate its normative mores. Therefore, the individual resists at two levels: within one's self and within one's culture.

Hughes's *The Well of Horniness* is an exemplary representation of lesbian camp's ability to disrupt the normative gaze for its own purposes. In the case of *The Well of Horniness*, Hughes simultaneously disrupts both the heteronormative and lesbian stereotypes of lesbian, specifically challenging the subjects of *in/visibility* and *a/sexuality*. Beginning with its name, *The Well of Horniness* is a parody of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. The novel, written in 1928, had been controversial from its initial publication. British courts deemed it obscene. But it quickly became a part of the lesbian literary canon and popularized by the controversies and outwardly lesbian themes. It is important to note that *The Well of Loneliness*, while labeled obscene by British courts, did not possess graphically sexual scenes; instead it was judged by its pronounced homosexual content. This lack of sexuality makes Hughes's *The Well of Horniness* an even more impious dialogue among the novel, lesbian history/ communities, and feminism(s):

> When I tried the title out on friends, I got a few appreciative laughs, but mostly what I got was mild disgust. Women, I was reminded, did not get horny; in fact, they could not get horny if they wanted to. . . . If I really wanted to write about lesbian sexuality, I shouldn't be using the vocabulary of male heterosexuality" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 17).

But then Hughes has never been good at following directions or acquiescing to the dogma of her people. *The Well of Horniness* is a stimulating appropriation of a "whodunit" dinner theater production, with sponsors like Shag 'N' Stuff carpets and Clams A-Go-Go of Passaic, as well as vignettes of dancing crustaceans in drag. With characters like the Lady Dick and Garnet McClit, Hughes presents a hypersexual homosexual world dripping with double and triple entendres, while at the same time establishing an accessible vocabulary that

engages the spectator into identification with the material, only to later estrange the connections the spectator previously made with the material.

The Well of Horniness is performed in three parts which Hughes is constantly manipulating the insider/outside "status" of the spectators. The first two parts do not include the word lesbian, instead employing substitutions such as *Lebanese*, *Tridelta Tribads*, *bra-burners*, *softball teams*, and *muff divers*:

LOUISE. Harold! Come over here! Right this minute!

HAROLD. What is it Louise?

LOUISE. It's those two new girls on the block, Harold, something about the way they walk, something about the way they talk… something about the way they look… at each other… Harold, I could swear they are Lebanese!

HAROLD. You're just imagining things, Louise. They're just a couple of… sorority girls.

NARRATOR. Have we got news for you, Harold. Those two girls are members of the Tridelta Tribads, an alleged sorority, but in reality just a thinly veiled entrance to the Well…

(*Cast Screams*) (*Clit Notes* 31-32)

The "everything but" lesbian identificatory practices in *The Well of Horniness* are fodder for Hughes as she exposes the heteronormative culture's postulations of "that which cannot be named," even adding her own superlatives with the hope of reclaiming the invisible as visible. This is not a throwaway, nor is it merely silly; instead, Hughes is creating a subjectivity of difference. She claims queer in everything fishy: from clambakes to the ocean and from beavers (okay, they aren't a fish but they do live off a river system) to South

Seas plantations, Hughes uses the words and images of the lesbian ghetto for the purposes of laughing with her own community while simultaneously disrupting heteronormative signifiers of lesbian (specifically, woman/not-woman, for if Hughes categorizes lesbian in a particular way, it most definitely is as woman).

Hughes is also exploiting heteronormative culture's stereotypes when using Lebanese or Tridelta Tribads. As seen in the example above, she also establishes a familiar portrait of a conversation between a married couple. Change the subject matter and it could be the beginning of any scene on Broadway or even the most conservative regional theater. Hughes does not invert subjectivity from one community to the other; she does not use her insider/ outsider status in contempt of heteronormative culture. Rather, *The Well of Horniness* invites everyone (hetero, homo, omni, queer, Greek, geek, urbanite, suburbanite, fish lover, vegetarian, action star, drama queen) to step into its world and at the same time recognize and relinquish as well as celebrate and confuse our desires, stereotypes, political correctness, and (in)visibility (to say the least).

In the scene above, Hughes first established a heteronormative gaze, with the married couple's home representing the center of heteronormative values, Harold and Louise the "everyman/woman," and the window serving as a boundary between the un/known, the in/visible, the a/moral. She places into tension the precariousness of lesbian in/visibility within heteronormative culture: two women holding hands, read as asexual in a similar reading of *Boston Marriages*[29]—or, in this case, sorority girls. Hughes then disrupts the normative reading and viewing, not only through the pun on tribadism and the Greek letter

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[29] Research into Boston marriages may be started with Rothblum, Esther D. and Kathleen A. Brehony, ed. *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1993.

delta inverted (lesbians were often spoken of as inverts in the nineteenth century), which has become a pride symbol for gays and lesbians, but also through her use of Lebanese. Lebanese is the first clue that something is amiss. Hughes did not choose this word merely for how the "l" and "s" roll off the tongue (all puns intended). *The Well of Horniness* premiered at the WOW Café in 1983. That year in Lebanon, 241 United States service personnel were killed in a bombing there. Deemed, "the deadliest terrorist attack on Americans prior to Sept. 11" (Murphy), the 1983 bombing changed Lebanon's relationship with the United States, as the peacekeeping troops (U.S. included) pulled out of Lebanon. Hughes's use of Lebanese – to an early to mid 1980s audience – estranged the moment and complicated our (the audience) laughter under the harsh light of assumption. Hughes draws the audience into the scene and then snaps us out of the scene through reframing the scene with a multiplicity of meanings in every moment. Hughes breaks the gaze by layering seemingly simple cultural constructs with so much political and social meaning the constructs themselves become lost signifiers. Hughes abuses humanity's need to create order out of chaos as she coerces the audience into creating new meaning and recognizing the artificial edification of the signs. The audience then moves towards reinterpretation, using the energy and emotions collected in the space (from performer[s] and the spectator[s]), a community is formed (if only for this occasion), and that unique community begins reorganizing the signs and signifiers, actively participating, playing, and exploring interpretation.

But the gaze cannot operate alone in reading and viewing practices, especially when the performance is interested in disrupting the reading and viewing practices of a diverse spectatorship. Split Britches, like Hughes, performed at the WOW Café. They also toured

extensively throughout the United States and Western Europe. Split Britches used the lesbian camp strategies of disrupting identity politics within the butch-femme couple, multi-layering of character/actor/character, as well as fantasy identifications to confuse heteronormative, lesbian, and feminist signs and signifiers. In other words, Split Britches further obscures heteronormative, lesbian, and feminist gazes through their lesbian camp strategies. Therefore, it is important to return to Kaja Silverman and her complication of gaze theory as Silverman's construction of the gaze, the look, and the screen (re)organizes reading and viewing practices – away from hierarchical understandings – toward a more Foucaultian understanding; that is, Silverman re(constructs) the gaze as deriving – not from an omniscient cultural standpoint – but from everywhere and everyone. According to Silverman, the gaze must operate within a combined system of the gaze, the look, and the screen. The look is often mistaken for the gaze or, at least, the look and the gaze are often conflated. The look, however, "has the capacity to see things that the camera/gaze cannot see" (Silverman *Threshold* 136). The eye then becomes its metaphor and, therefore, "the eye is always to some degree resistant to the discourses which seek to master and regulate it, and can even, on occasion, dramatically oppose the representational logic and material practices which specify exemplary vision at a given moment in time" (Silverman *Threshold* 156). The look possesses the ability to see beyond the frame of the camera/gaze (literally and figuratively) and resist a specified reading. Distinguishing between the look and the gaze becomes important when referring to the subjectivity of the spectator, as the look allows the spectator to question the specificity of the gaze's image as well as accept/understand the image. Regardless, the look establishes an active viewer because of its potential to see beyond the gaze.

The screen, on the other hand, is defined by Silverman as "the site at which the gaze is defined for a particular society, and is consequently responsible for both the way in which the inhabitants of the society experience the gaze's effects, and for much of the seeming particularity of the society's visual regime" (*Threshold* 135). The screen defines the image as a "culturally generated image or repertoire of images through which subjects are not only constituted, but differentiated in relation to class, race, sexuality, age, and nationality" (Silverman *Threshold* 150). It is the arbitrator between the gaze and ourselves as well as giving us "shape and significance to how we are seen by . . . how we define and interact with . . . to whom we attribute our visibility, and how we are perceived in the world" (Silverman *Threshold* 174). The screen filters culture signs and individual experiences into a language from which the images may be coded. While the screen certainly defines differences (especially from culture to culture), it at the same time has the potential to disregard or blur signs that fall outside the individual and/or cultural understanding.

Strategies within lesbian camp continually use and abuse the gaze in order to disrupt the screen and the look. Reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's "not . . . but" (a method of difference),[30] lesbian camp spoils the heteronormative gaze through exposing the frame from which the camera and the screen are focusing, and therefore urging the look to see beyond representation—to reveal the possibilities outside of the heteronormative binaries. The

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[30] Brecht's method of the "not . . . but" is an acting technique upon which the actor, "when he appears on the stage, besides what he is actually doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges clearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out the possible variants." Brecht, Bertolt, and John Willett. *Brecht on Theater : The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964 (137).The technique asks the performer to constantly be aware of what s/he is and is not presenting/deciding/ feeling/thinking/doing. Brecht's method of the "not . . . but" " does not necessarily lead to a disconnect between character and performer, rather it eludes the possibility for a passive spectator because the "not . . . but" imposes subjectivity upon the character, actor, and spectator. The "not . . . but" exposes the constructedness of the moment.

spectator is mobilized through her/his desires and process of identification that is within and (especially) outside the presented gaze. Elin Diamond, feminist theorist and Brechtian scholar, states, "Each action must contain the trace of the action it represses, thus the meaning of each action contains difference. The audience is invited to look beyond representation—beyond what is authoritatively put in view—to the possibilities of as yet unarticulated actions or judgments" ("Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory" 86). Presenting an action with a trace of a repressed possibility is where lesbian camp thrives.

Split Britches' 1982 production of *Beauty and the Beast* explores lesbian identities, specifically butch-femme identifications. Through the exploration of lesbian identities, *Beauty and the Beast* presents opportunities to discover strategies of lesbian camp that lead towards an activated spectatorship. In this production, Lois Weaver played Beauty as a Salvation Army Sergeant, Deb Margolin played Father as a Jewish Rabbi in toe shoes, and Peggy Shaw performed the Beast as Gussie Umberger, "an 84-year-old hoofer" (Case *Split Britches* 60). Shaw, a tall handsome woman enters the stage wearing a dress and bonnet suitable for her character's eighty-four years. But while Margolin physically embraces her character (the Jewish Rabbi), Shaw's Gussie walks strongly, with a gait befitting Shaw herself. Of course, the Converse high-tops and athletic socks scrunched down around her ankles remind us that this is no mischaracterization on Shaw's part. Shaw's masculinity festers under Gussie's dress but even as Shaw continues to don layer after layer of caricature, from the "old lady handbag" to the Beast's cape, she (mis)signals the audience as to the authenticity of her identity:

BEAST. I have lived here for many years, alone and unloved. My ugliness has kept me to myself. Many is the traveler, who lost or broken, has found his way to my table and eaten as you have. Only those who are heartbroken survive.

FATHER. And the others?

BEAST. I EAT THEM!

FATHER. So one might call you a consumer of happiness[31]

BEAST. I reckon so…

FATHER. Grant me one thing, then. that I may return home and give my Beauty this rose for which my life will be the recompense.

BEAST. Will you return?

FATHER. I shirk my debts to no man.

BEAST. I'm not a man.

FATHER. I don't look for loopholes. (Case *Split Britches* 72-73)

Shaw does not deform her shape to resemble the Beast of lore, instead preferring to drape a cartoonish King's cape (artificial cheetah fur and all) over her shoulders. In the above scene, the Beast clearly states that s/he is not a man. There the Beast stands, wearing an old lady dress, a plastic beaded necklace, sneakers, and a cape. The Beast stands tall, warning the Father of the fate of his family should he not fulfill his promise. What, then, is the Beast's ugliness?

The layering of Gussie onto Shaw and the Beast onto Gussie creates multiple readings of normative culture's aversion towards getting older (especially in women), as well

[31] In the text of *Beauty and the Beast*, there are lines between "I eat them" and "So one might call you a consumer of happiness," but in performance these lines were said as I have written them in the script. For a link to the performance, please see: http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/NYUb13530486.html (accessed from December 2008-June 2009).

as the ugliness encountered in female masculinity. Split Britches' abuse of the fairy tale complicates the Beast's desires as read and/or viewed within the audience, while at the same time establishing her/his desire as ugly. The desire, the ugliness, keeps the Beast lonely and unloved. His/her loneliness stings as it acknowledges the shame endure from her/his desires. The multiple layers of Shaw/Gussie/Beast encourage an abundance of readings and identifications which in turn disrupts empathetic readings, although simultaneously holding a mirror up to the spectator—reframing the moment as a question rather than allowing the moment to arrest into apathetic acceptance of circumstance.

Shaw and Margolin are quickly able to disrupt the injury/shame with (homo)sexual innuendo about eating and consuming the Beast's visitors. The tension between the two—to expose our deepest shrapnel (to use Hughes's terminology) within our bodies and yet to express our *SEXuality* at the same time—disrupts the gaze. The intention is not to create change through shared identity; rather the intention is to establish a shared occasion. It is the shared occasion that will seduce an activated spectatorship. The moment actively engages the spectators as individuals and community members while also developing a lesbian discourse through joy. Joy is prevalent throughout lesbian camp. It establishes an approachable relationship between the performers and spectators. Joy works from the inside out. What I mean by this is that joy abounds in environments without hierarchical convictions. This is not to say that joyful occasions lack definition or conviction; rather, joy allows for receptivity. Receptivity in turn allows for the establishment of a community of viewers and/or readers eager to experience and participate in the occasion.

Split Britches continues to place into tension shame and pride once the Father allows Beauty to take his place as the Beast's captive. Beast, over dinner, asks Beauty if she finds the

Beast ugly. Beauty admits that she does. This does not deter the Beast, as s/he asks Beauty to marry multiple times, each time eliciting the answer no. The Beast continues day after day finally pleading.[32]

> BEAST. I'll be Gertrude Stein to your Alice B. Toklas. I'll be Spencer Tracy to your Katharine Hepburn. I'll be James Dean to your… Montgomery Clift.
>
> BEAUTY. Well, I always wanted to *be* Katharine Hepburn
>
> BEAST. I always wanted to *be* James Dean.
>
> BEAUTY. I *was* Katharine Hepburn
>
> BEAST. I *was* James Dean (Case *Split Brtiches* 82).

Just as in Shaw's and Bette Bourne's scene from *Belle Repriere* in Chapter II, Weaver and Shaw's butch-femme gender performativities betray their desires, leaving them exposed to the recuperative powers of heteronormative culture: shame or mimetic gender roles. And yet, in their gender performativities, they find pleasure and pride through identifications *with* Stein, Toklas, Tracy, Dean, Clift, and Hepburn.

Beauty and the Beast begin to weave two coming-out stories, painful and confusing yet hungry and joyful. Jill Dolan, in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, writes:

> Most coming-out stories continue to refer to the heterosexual paradigm the "new" lesbian is leaving. The focus is on her decision, on revealing her sexuality to her family, and on her hesitant entry into her new community, rather than on a full consideration of the lifestyle she intends to assume. This locks the coming-out play

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[32] Again, one of the differences between the performance and the script is that in performance, after every proposal, the Beast states that s/he will return tomorrow. The passage of time was not initially written into the script.

> in an oppositional stance that is defined by the heterosexual worlds the lesbian wants to leave. (109-10)

Beauty and the Beast is not a traditional coming-out narrative; rather, it is as play about lesbian desire and the many forms it takes, along with the hurdles often associated with acting upon such desires. The transformation of the more traditional coming-out plays, that is to say the movement from a closet lesbian to a lesbian operating within heteronormative culture (jobs, education, social, and political occasions), is intertwined with the tangible corporality of pride and shame; it is intertwined in the choices we make: to be (in)visible, to be (a) political, to live in/outside the ghetto.

Instead of engaging a particular coming-out narrative, Weaver and Shaw saturate their desires with the pain of intolerance and misunderstanding, exposing their desires as constructs. *Beauty and the Beast* places into tension identities and desires through its layering of character/actor, pride/shame, butch-femme/beauty-beast, and fairytale/film iconography/tangible realities. The audience is forced to (re)interpret the incongruous juxtaposition of Shaw playing Gussie playing the Beast wanting to be James Dean, becoming James Dean. No single identity endures; no single identity can be assumed to be organic or automatic. Once again, the disruption of identity forces new meaning upon the scene. The audience becomes the primary meaning maker, culling identificatory moments piecemeal from the scene as each individual acknowledges his/her pride/shame threshold; each individual is coerced into (re)examining his/her desires, priorities, choices, fears, politics.

Moreover, while rhythmically and poetically explosive, the Beauty and Beast's transformation from "I always wanted" to "I *was*" simulates the ease by which constructed desires have the potential to become essential. And while the essentialist debate among the

gay and lesbian populations is one for a later date, the transformation from "wanted" to "was" is a powerful moment in production, as it also represents the moment when the two, for the first time, see each other differently. Of course, Shaw and Weaver are not becoming James Dean and Katharine Hepburn, but instead are extending their desires into iconic film or fantasy identifications. Hart explains the importance of such fantasy identification:

> Fantasy identifications that refuse modern constructs of same sex or opposite sex desire—that is, gendered object choices—*constitute* that desire. Consequently, the possibility is open for spectators to substitute their own identifications or to overlay them onto the performers, thus "universalizing" the performance. (*Acting Out* 131)

Split Britches' "universalizing" inverts traditional gaze theory and theories of representation as there is no tangible male desire. Even as Shaw/Gussie/Beast becomes James Dean, "I *was* James Dean," man is only represented as a fantasy archetype. This is not to say that men will not have moments of identification with the piece; instead, the inversion works not only to expose the constructedness of gender, sexuality, and sex but also to expose the hierarchy of representation as a social construct. The audience is placed in an uneasy geography of simultaneously interpreting as individual and group. The individual may or may not be in tension with the group, as identifications are constructed through an inverted representation. For, as there is not one identity "lesbian," neither is there a single identity "heterosexual." As Weaver, Shaw, and Margolin layer their individual identities and thereby complicated butch-femme, heterosexual, homosexual, Jew, Christian, lesbian, mother, African American, Latino, Asian, wealthy, poor identitities, they are at the same time revealing opportunities for the spectators to relate to—not as hetero, homo, queer, lesbian,

gay, straight, woman, man, or other, but as present within the experience. And it is this presence that captivates the audience.

Resisting the binaries of identificatory practices while trying to enable an activated spectatorship is not easy, but as Biddy Martin—while discussing feminism and Foucault—reminds us, "Foucault insists that our subjectivity, our identity, and our sexuality are intimately linked; they do not exist outside of or prior to language and representation but are actually brought into play by discursive strategies and representational practices. The relationship between the body and discourse or power is not a negative one; power renders the body active and productive" ("Feminism, Criticism, and Foucault" 9). Strategies within lesbian camp work to interrupt the link between identity, subjectivity, and sexuality that in turn exposes dynamics of power and representation. Most often, as is the case with the work of Holly Hughes, the disturbance takes place in the joyful moments of chaos.

In Hughes's *World Without End*, we (the spectators) see her struggling with power, language, subjectivity, and the (in)visibility of women's sexuality. And, on some level, it also becomes about lesbian subjectivity and identity. But rather than exploring the tensions between language, power, and subjectivity in terms of hierarchical oppression, Hughes embraces lesbian camp strategies that focus on destabilizing subjectivity, identity, and sexuality. In other words, where institutionalized power meets female sexuality, subjectivity is examined and exposed at the very moment where woman meets mother and crazy meets bitch. Hughes refuses the "either/or" dichotomies; regardless of the outcome her strategies may accommodate resistance, but always render the body active:

> I'm in school, and I discover Big Problem Number Two. You see, the French I got from my mother, and the French they're trying to teach me in school—*they don't match.*
>
> They're trying to tell me that my mother didn't know French. They're trying to tell me her way of talking, with her tears and her pussy and with her sentences which could say "death" but mean "pleasure" in the same breath, and her words—her words which were like fifteen gold bracelets sliding down the arm of a woman dancing in a French nightclub—they're saying: "That's not French. That's not the *real* French."
>
> In fact, they're saying that none of what was said between us was real at all.
>
> Do you know what I learned in school?
>
> I learned in school that there's no word, in French or in any other language that I know, for the kind of woman my mother was. There's no word, in French or any other language that I know, for a woman who is a mother and a woman at the same time. (*Clit Notes* 169)

Her mother's French is a culture of women's sexuality that is simultaneously defiant and consumed by western culture. This French is sensual, sexy, voyeuristic, and female. It is an almost untouchable French, impossible to imagine in our dualistic economy of hetero/ homo, good girl/bad girl, and virgin/whore.

When I performed my Acting II final monologue from *World Without End*, I misread the occasion. It was easy to do. I misread Hughes. I brought my identity politics to the performance; I did not leave my assumptions at the door. I was not open to the occasion—I did not understand how a comedy could be simultaneously inclusive and disruptive. My

misreading failed the performance; my misreading failed to provide accessibility so necessary to lesbian camp performances. I was angry and so was my monologue. The monologue did not work in class or in final performance. There was no joy nor was there the possibility for a useable reception. This portion of the monologue relies heavily on reception and the audience's ability to imagine desire in a breath—to expose our (the spectator's) desires in our tears—to confront our identities and our identifications with Otherness. Without the joy found in the "fifteen gold bracelets sliding down the arm of a woman," there can be no *identification with*; there can be no desire and no resistance. Hughes next wonders if it was all a lie, this language of her mother's. She, too, struggles with boundaries of heteronormative culture's vision of women's sexuality, but ultimately is able to assess that her mother was neither and yet both what she grew up believing and what others saw: "Do you know what they said about my mother? They said: 'Holly, your mother is crazy. Nobody did anything to her. She's just crazy.' And I started to agree. A little while later, we were both right. My mother was one crazy bitch" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 170).

As much as this chapter's exploration engages spectatorship generally and introduces the artists' interests in performing in diverse venues, it is important to note that the artists producing lesbian camp had a single spectator in mind. The artists in lesbian camp had the lesbian spectator in mind when developing, producing, and performing their work. The single spectator should not disrupt the discourse on reception and lesbian camp's ability to leave no spectator behind; rather, as director Anne Bogart writes, "one of the most accessible works of theater I have ever directed . . . spoke to many people because I chose one person to speak to" (111). Hughes's *The Well of Horniness* exemplifies Bogart's point. *The Well of Horniness*, as stated earlier was written on a dare for Hughes's friends at the WOW

Café. The *Well of Horniness* has become one of Hughes's more successful plays. Hughes and her friends were never able to perform the piece the in the same venue twice, but it has had extended runs in New York and Los Angeles, and was most recently performed at the College of Staten Island in April 2009.

The *Well of Horniness* is excessively sexual, focusing on campy double entendres and diving into a vernacular that is stolen, slippery, and queer. For, as lesbian and feminist theorist Lynda Hart states,

> These lesbians do not seek visibility among the negative semantic spaces and cognitive gaps of the patriarchal unconscious; rather, they seize the apparatus, distort its mirrors, and lead the audience into the interstitial dance space, where lesbian subjectivity refuses the dichotomy of the revealed and concealed (*Acting Out* 133).

Act III, scene i, the previously invisible becoming visible:

> NARRATOR. The setting, a peaceful New England town, just a town like many others, where the men are men—
>
> OFFSTAGE VOICE. And so are the women!
>
> NARRATOR. The play that puts lesbians on the map… and possibly the menu!
>
> MARGARET DUMONT. Do tell, how are the lesbians today?
>
> BABS. Hot! Mmmmmmmmm . . .
>
> GARNET. Steaming . . .
>
> (*Slurping sounds.*)
>
> GEORGETTE. Served in their own juices!
>
> (*Lip Smacking.*)(Hughes *Clit Notes* 56)

The Lebanese and Tridelta Tribads have been named, but there is a cost. Judith Butler speaks to the cost of naming, as she warns,

> identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for liberatory contestations of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies. ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 13-14).

Producers of lesbian camp certainly share Butler's concern regarding identity and identification. Hart acknowledges this, stating that camp "affirms what it denies. It is aggressive but not indifferent" (*Acting Out* 134). Therefore, while lesbian is revealed, the game is still on. Now *lesbian* connotes all that has come before as well as everything left out and anything yet to be named. It remains a destabilizing identity upon which all spectators can create *identifications with* but have difficulty identifying *as*.

Hart's aggressive attribute is seen immediately after the opening dyke humor of Act III, where Hughes denudes lesbian identity as seen in heteronormative culture as well as lesbian culture.

> NARRATOR. This is the play women who love women have been waiting to see!
>
> BABS. Can that chowder! Who wants to see an uptight WASP from the Midwest stumble around in a polyester dress? I'm the one they come to see.
>
> CARMELITA. Who's gonna see you on the radio?
>
> NARRATOR. A collaborative effort-
>
> BABS. This is my big moment! I got my teeth capped for this part!

NARRATOR. Unlike traditional theater . . .

ROD. Hey, hey, girls come on—remember there are no small parts.

GARNET. There are only small minds, Rod.

BABS. You should know, you've got one of the smallest!

NARRATOR. A proverbial filling up and spilling over of Sapphic sentiment!

VICKI. Good things come in small actresses!

BABS. Tell me about it, I came in several small actresses.

NARRATOR. Yes, ladies and genders, our show is another fine example of women working together.

CARMELITA. Where's my lipstick! Which one of you took my lipstick!

NARRATOR. A testimonial to women's love for one another!

BABS. I wouldn't touch anything of yours!

NARRATOR. Of their ability to surmount the limitations of their own egos, to work collectively!

BABS. I'm the star! I'm the star! I'm the star! (*Clit Notes* 57-58)

Hughes is purposely excessive, debunking the idealized lesbian utopian myth with highly sexual, highly genderized, and self-aggrandizing women. The fierceness of Hughes's lesbians in *SEXuality* is also seen in the characters' interactions with one another. The sexually charged language of this production is not only fun for the participants, but also a conscious abandonment of lesbians' invisibility through friendship, "Sapphic sentiment," and "women who love women." Hughes ambushes the lesbian community with the same gusto she does the heteronormative community, forcing the spectator to relinquish lesbian

identity as being "more about sitting in circles than sitting on each other's faces" (Love "A Gentle Angry People" 98).

Lesbian camp resonates not only with lesbians but also with feminists, heterosexuals, and queers. It uses its strategies of disrupting the heteronormative reading and viewing practices, exposing the social construction of gender, sexuality, and sex, and disturbing identity and identity politics in order to create an activate spectatorship. Chapter IV builds on lesbian camp's relationship with its spectators, exploring the ways in which lesbian camp performers and performance affected the feminist movement as well as popular culture. In other words, who among us will ever think of the Lebanese in the same way?

CHAPTER IV

CITIZENSHIP, OR, WHERE THEORY AND PRACTICE MEET

But we can not move theory into action unless we can find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life. I have written the stories that follow to give theory flesh and breath.
Pratt (22)

Lesbian camp has always been political. Peggy Shaw during an interview with Kate Davy states, "As lesbians you have no choice but to be political . . . the very nature of being a lesbian is political because it always causes a political discussion or a sexual discussion" ("Shaw and Weaver Interviews" 1004). Lesbian camp's politics stems from its engagement with the debates within feminism, lesbian feminism, and the gay and lesbian civil rights movement. Lesbian camp, coming into its own in the early 1980s, found itself in the midst of divisive criticisms within feminism and heteronormative culture. Lesbian camp performers used lesbian camp strategies and an activated spectatorship to transform the either/or politics of 1980s feminism, lesbian feminism, and heteronormative culture into complex, situational, and contradictory discourses revolving around gender, sexuality, multiculturalism, and art.

I begin this chapter exploring the ways in which lesbian camp performers Holly Hughes, Split Britches, and Carmelita Tropicana disrupt the popular theories and methodologies and/or practices within feminism and the larger heteronormative culture. In some cases, specifically with that of Holly Hughes, I discover a direct dialogue between

performer and politician—between theory and practice. In other cases, I detect a more enigmatic (re)consideration of theory and practice. I further develop the relationship between feminist lesbian identity politics and lesbian camp, specifically regarding sexuality, butch-femme, and drag, with the intention of answering the following questions: How did lesbian performance practices differ from popular theories and (political) methods of feminists during the culture wars and the feminist sex wars? and How did these performance practices provoke feminist theory and practice since the sex wars?

The feminist sex wars play a crucial role in the development of lesbian camp. Lesbian camp was a tactic used by the performers at the WOW Café to engage the debates, provoking dialogue, and disrupting the austerity of sex wars feminism. The originator of the phrase sex wars remains unknown but it is said to have been developed during the 1982 Feminist IX Conference, *Towards a Politics of Sexuality*, at Barnard College.[33] There, Gayle Rubin spoke of a "sex panic" that was transforming mainstream feminism into a weapon used by the neoconservatives for the purposes of tightening legislation against pornography, obscenity, and alternative sexualities. The sex wars were predominantly placed in the realm of white middle class heterosexual feminists with the exception of the pornography/obscenity debate, which immediately revolved around homosexuality and the arts.

Both sides of the feminist sex wars were absurdly rigid. Both sides of the feminist sex wars fought vigorously for the moral high ground and used identity politics to position

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[33] For a more in depth study of the Barnard Conference and the feminist sex wars, please read the following: Duggan, Lisa, and Nan D. Hunter. *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Vance, Carole S. Conf Author Scholar, and Conference the Feminist. *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984. Gerhard, Jane F. *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001.

themselves for or against issues. This simultaneously created a sense of pluralism within identity politic (particularly lesbian and feminist) while also forcing individuals to side within the debate or risk one's identity being dismissed. Feminist journalist Ellen Willis states, "Since the mid-80s, the intensity of the sex debates has waned, not because the issues are any closer to being resolved, but because the two sides are so far apart they have nothing more to say to each other"(*No More Nice Girls* 20). Additionally, the majority of women, feminists, and lesbians were caught between sanitized identities.[34] It is here where venues like the WOW Café and lesbian camp did their best work; where they fumbled, failed, and flourished in their attempts to disrupt the ferocity of the feminist sex wars and the sanctity of the identity politic.

Many of the WOW performances were explicitly sexual, especially from artists like Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Split Britches. Their sexual explicitness is a verbalization of their desires and their identities. Their sexual explicitness also begins to return lesbian back to the realm of sexuality with all of its sweat, desire, and messiness. Each performer explores her own sexual historicity, exposing the complexities and contradictions within their own constructions of lesbian. In her 1989 solo performance piece *World Without End*, Hughes not only comes to terms with her mother's death and her mother's story, but also her own:

> After my mother died, I probably don't need to tell you this, but all of my sentences started with "after my mother died. . . ."

[34] By sanitized identities, I mean theoretical identities that cannot and do not incorporate or embrace the complexities and contradictions involved in an individual's whole life.

> And then, a little while after my mother died, the only thing I really wanted to do was fuck.
>
> So there's this guy at work, right?
>
> Always hovering over my PC. Asking me if I wanted to go to the Blarney Stone. So finally I got to say to him: "Look, buddy, *I hate you.* You're an idiot, and I'm a lesbian, and you touch, you're a dead man, okay?"
>
> And he's laughing. I've never been so funny in my life.
>
> After my mother died, I told him that she had died, and *he started to cry.* I couldn't believe it. This guy I thought was an idiot was crying, all over the copier about my mother. And I thought: "Okay maybe you're going to get lucky after all."
>
> All of a sudden, I knew what I wanted. I wanted to be nasty. . . .
>
> I said: "Okay, cowboy. Here's the program. You're on the menu. We're gonna take the plunge. We're gonna go for broke. (*Clit Notes* 177)

The death of her mother leaves a space that Hughes wants to fill with sex. And so she does, with her "idiot" coworker. As the above scene indicates, Hughes's sexual fling with her coworker is easy because she knows how to speak the language—it is her mother's language. But it is also a moment it time. The complexities of her relationship with her co-worker become a metaphor for her relationship with feminism and lesbianism: aggressive and contingent while also passionate and joyful.

In an interview with Rebecca Schneider, Hughes admits, "I have a piece that I didn't include where I said that I have a lot of rules in my life and having a lot of rules convinces me that I'm still a lesbian even though I might fuck a guy" (181). Hughes's lesbianism is not the desexualized lesbianism associated with one side of the feminist sex wars; rather it is

complicated and contradictory sexuality. At the same time Hughes refuses to deny herself a community and identifications with her desires. Hughes's refusal to deny herself and her spectators' complex identifications with lesbianism and feminism becomes a part of the feminist sex wars discourse. *World Without End* attacks the divisiveness of the "sex war" identity politics through the imperfection and misperceptions of relationships as seen by a daughter intrigued and yet suspicious of her mother. Through *World Without End*, Hughes denies a constant identity, instead embracing sex from multiple positions.

Carmelita Tropicana enters the discourse as she also oozes sexuality in her performances, but more importantly she confronts feminist discourse through drag as she disrupts fixed notions of Latina Lesbianism. Many feminists find drag problematic, especially as a feminist strategy. Feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye explains, "This femininity is affected and characterized by theatrical exaggeration. It is a casual and cynical mockery of women, for whom femininity is the trappings of oppression, but it is also a kind of play, a toying with that which is taboo" (137). Even feminist performance theorist Kate Davy agrees. Returning to the discussion in Chapter II, Davy is reticent to inscribe camp onto the humor of Shaw, Weaver, Hughes, and Carmelita Tropicana because she believes that camp, and more specifically drag, "while it certainly says something about women, is primarily about men, addressed to men, and for men" ("Fe/Male Impersonation" 133). *Drag queening*, then, is seen as yet another way women are objectified and discriminated against. The anti-drag feminist point of view uses a strict hierarchical power structure where white men are at the top and women of color are at the bottom. Drag queening is therefore seen as an option only for the privileged few who can take on and off costumes at will, depending upon their social, political, and economic circumstances. Women once again are thought to be

objectified because the drag performances create the spectacle of Woman, an unachievable identity for most women. *Drag kinging*, on the other hand is seen as women wanting to feel the power of the Man, even if temporarily. Even drag kinging is seen as problematic in this feminist model because while seemingly wishing to engage heteronormative culture as Man, the drag king is also read as re-inscribing the invisibility of Woman.

However, the work of Carmelita Tropicana disrupts notions of Man and Woman in exciting ways. First, Carmelita Tropicana is herself a character created by Alina Troyano. Tropicana, as described in Chapter II, is a flourish of a grossly stereotypical Latina lesbian. With her thick Cuban accent, high heels, fruit boa, and slinky yet sparkly red dress, Troyano fondles the heteronormative white stereotype of Latina women. It is an excessive performance meant to expose cultural, gender, and sexual bias. Troyano, in an interview with David Román, admits, "some white feminists were offended by my performance; they thought it was too much of a stereotype" (91). Such a reaction by some white feminists only emphasizes the bias Troyano is trying to disrupt. Tropicana is a drag performance; Tropicana is a cultural formation by which Troyano recycles images of pre-revolutionary Cuba as well as heteronormative white culture's fantasies of Cuba.[35]

Memories of a Revolution (1987) opens with Tropicana walking out onto stage in front of a projected image of a postcard—a tourist-type postcard of Havana. While holding a rose, she begins:

> Memories from the deep recess cavity of my mind, misty water color . . .
>
> Memorias—we all have them. (to audience) You do. And I, Carmelita Tropicana,

---

[35] Carmelita Tropicana is a cultural formation because Troyano abuses stereotypes from Cuban and American culture to create Tropicana. Tropicana, while possessing depth in character is a mirror between the two cultures, offering one stereotype for another, forcing disruptions of believes through our own reflections.

have them of my beloved country Cuba. (looking back at the slide projection) Who knew in 1955 what was to happen to us? Who knew then what destiny was to be? If maybe my baby brother Machito had his mind more on the revolution and his date with destiny than on his date with the two Americanas, who knows? Who knows?

She flings the rose at the audience and exits. Blackout (*I, Carmelita Tropicana* 2)

Tropicana's performance is a drag performance and, as discussed in Chapter II, it incongruously juxtaposes Woman, Latina, and Lesbian. The excessiveness of the opening performance exposes to the audience the tensions between the real and the unreal, Troyano and Tropicana, memories and histories. Troyano/Tropicana blurs the borders, creating her own history from a mixture of her own personal memories, Cuban cultural memories, and US cultural memories. She then manipulates the tensions as she woos her audience with thick accent and Latina sensuality, allowing us (her audience) to go back in time with her, to let her tell us a story. She, like the rose she throws into the audience, is simultaneously beautiful and formidable. Troyano/Tropicana first seduces the spectators through her language of the body and with her words, establishing a common ground through our memories/histories. Only then (as discussed in detail in Chapter II) to expose us to our own cultural biases as the lights restore into scene 1, where two American women in matching polka-dot dresses wait for Tropicana's brother Machito. Troyano/Tropicana's playground is the borderland between Cuba and the United States, Latina and lesbian, Woman and women, butch-femme and feminist. Tropicana is fluent in the language of cultural tourism; she creates a Cuban authenticity just right for soliciting.

Continuing with Troyano/Tropicana's memories/stories, scene 6 moves the performance into high camp, with Rosita Charo and the Tropicanettes performing "Yes, We

Have No Bananas" in front of a backdrop of palm trees and flowers, multi-colored lamé curtains and dresses, and, of course, fruit—lots and lots of fruit, especially on the posteriors of the women. The Tropicanettes dance and sing, spreading out from the stage to envelop the audience. The Tropicanettes transform the relationship between performer/spectator into a party for all to participate in and enjoy. Aside from the all-out excessiveness of costumes, scenery, and choreography, the scene's drag performances by Rosita and the Tropicanettes simultaneously debunk and celebrate drag (as well as Latino cabaret and US industrialization of Central and South America, and the Caribbean). The performers deliberately layer a hyper-gendered performance on top of their own characters as well as their own gendered bodies. The tensions between the actor Kate Stanford and her character, Captain Maldito (corrupt Cuban police), and the character Tropicanette, deconstruct the possibilities of drag to be read hierarchically. There is no verisimilitude between either Capitan Maldito or the Tropicanette; therefore, Standford's drag performance of both, placed in tension with one another, exposes not only the construction of sex and gender but of drag as well. The oversized fruit attached to the performers' rear ends and the exaggerated lamé gowns expose drag as the stereotype it could potentially become. The Tropicanettes' performance does not allow for the drag performance to maintain the status quo for masculinity or femininity; the performance disrupts Woman and Man as well as masculine and feminine. And this is the key to Troyano/Tropicana's drag performances, whether she performs Pingalito Betancourt (his first name means little penis) or as Tropicana, she continually disrupts drag, which in turn destabilizes the performance itself: in scene 6 it is the turbulence of the Tropicanettes; in the prologue it is Tropicana herself—the drag performance itself is placed into question as Troyano/Tropicana admits, "Identity really

depends on where you are at, it's so much about geography. . . . All of these shifts in identity depend upon who is doing the seeing" (Román 90).

In her editor's introduction to *I, Carmelita Tropicana*, Chon A. Noriega states Troyano/Tropicana "produces a performance that interrelates nationality, gender, and sexuality without reducing them to a single point of identification: 'Cuban lesbian artist.' Instead, Troyano stresses the 'multi, multi, multi'" (*I, Carmelita Tropicana* xi). Troyano/Tropicana's "multi, multi, multi" becomes the foundation upon which she creates a hybrid performances. By hybrid, I mean that Troyano/Tropicana attacks and dismantles the universal feminism, lesbianism, and Latina stereotypes from multiple perspectives—(re)memory, (re)historicizing the Cuban-American lesbian. Other feminists of color engaged in similar practices, but Troyano/Tropicana's lesbian camp strategies not only disrupted feminist and heteronormative practices, but also disrupted lesbian and camp strategies as well. Troyano/Tropicana turns drag upside down in the same way that drag turns gender upside down. Troyano/Tropciana leaves no room for hierarchical readings and/or viewing practices; she leaves no room for a stable politics or identity. As Troyano/Tropicana shifts from memories to histories to stories and as she perfected her hybrid lesbian drag (woman dragging woman and woman dragging man dragging woman), Troyano/Tropicana exposed complexities in identity politics of the feminist, lesbian, and Latina. Feminists and feminist lesbians within her community, as seen in the earlier quote, often misunderstood Troyano/Tropicana's exploration between identifications. These feminist mis-readings were due to a lack of openness to Troyano/Tropicana's contradictory identifications— the "multi, multi, multi." During the sex wars, feminist identity politics became the essence of the movements, the beliefs, the political goals, and theoretical discourses: "Identity politics has,

for many . . . emerge[d] as the quintessential form of the struggle for recognition and inclusion. It has seemed to provide precisely that combination of community and contest, of security and change, capable of addressing the concerns of those who have been excluded in contemporary democratic societies" (Dean 48). However, for Troyano/Tropicana and other lesbian campers, feminist identity politics during the sex wars meant exclusion from community and rejection of desires.

There is no doubt that the feminist sex wars and their wider-reaching counterpart, the US culture wars, put feminism in survival mode politically. Identity politics as well as an emphasis on lifestyle and public unity became more strident within the movement. What it meant to be a woman, feminist, and lesbian was changing and, for mainstream feminism, the tangible realities of women, particularly lesbians, were ignored or deemed problematic. Feminist and Poet Adrienne Rich acknowledged the increasingly problematic relationship between feminism and lesbianism in her 1980 *Signs* article, stating that one of her concerns was "the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship" (632). Mainstream feminism recognized lesbianism as theory or a utopian abstraction. Feminist scholar Carol Denver explains, "Lesbianism, when it enters into definitions of *feminism* at all, enters almost exclusively as a political ideal, undistinguished by any real erotic significance" (24). Therefore, when the WOW Café was established in 1982, with its drag parties, its erotic balls, and its celebration of the butch-femme couple, the Café became a refuge, "stolen from heterosexual nightmares: lesbians as hypersexual, as unrepentant out-laws, vampires, shameless deviants, and perverts" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 18). The WOW Café and the performances at the WOW Café became necessities for lesbians in and out of New York City. In her introduction to *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist*

Performance, Sue Ellen Case states, "The stage is theirs [Shaw's and Weaver's] and the stage is them. They have lived their lives and their relationship on the stage, improvising it into episodes and schtick for almost twenty years. They are the lesbian actors of their time" (34). Unfortunately, for some admirers, the sanctity of the WOW Café – its brand of lesbian subjectivity and butch-femme performativities—developed into its own determined lesbian institution. The following is one such example of how lesbian camp's greatest champions become critics and all because lesbian camp continues to remain incongruous, to exploit and explore from the inside out, and to reject authenticity.

In her interview with Holly Hughes, Rebecca Schneider asks Hughes about substantial feminist concerns—identity and reception—as well as a lesbian concern—assimilation—specifically regarding Hughes's collaboration with Split Britches in *Dress Suits to Hire*. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver asked Hughes to write *Dress Suits to Hire*. The production premiered at PS 122 in 1987. From its opening at PS 122, it would travel around New York City and then the United States. In 1988, *Dress Suits to Hire* was presented at the University of Michigan:

> SCHNEIDER: When *Dress Suits* was at Michigan University in Ann Arbor, there was a discussion afterward in which Sue-Ellen Case made the point that perhaps the piece would be better served performed exclusively for women. The argument was that the context of the academy—in the lap, so to speak, of dominant ideology—undermined the radical content of the play. And that for straight audiences it became . . . entertainment; that straight audiences and specifically male in that context couldn't somehow "read" the piece correctly. What do you think? (176)

The Michigan University argument Schneider referred to was Sue Ellen Case's criticism of the reception of *Dress Suits to Hire* at Michigan University. While initially, from Case's perspective, Hughes was questioning whether lesbian performance could leave the ghetto, Hughes saw it as an opportunity to expose the rigidity of lesbian identity politic practices, even from the lesbian feminists like Sue Ellen Case: "And then the really bad news, I'm not a lesbian, I don't meet the entrance requirements as established by Sue-Ellen Case. What a shock to my girlfriend. And what a way to get the news—from the highest authority on true Orthodox Lesbianism, Ms. Case" (Case and Hughes 17).

Hughes's response to Case is more about disrupting the rigidity of lesbian and feminist identity than it is about "doing it right." (What is the proper form of writing for a lesbian playwright? How does one become a "proper lesbian"?) Hughes wants her plays to move beyond the lesbian ghetto and speaks to the reception of her productions:

> I have to put my work in challenging venues. It has to stand up as art and I don't believe that it's something so fragile that people will—I mean, it's not going to be performed in the middle of Independence Plaza, but I feel like . . . I don't know that there is a straight male audience. I think that you can be noticed by the mainstream and not coopted. (Schneider and Hughes 177)

Dress Suits to Hire became the occasion upon which feminists and lesbians debated identity and reception. Performance studies professor Gwendolyn Alker, in her review of the revival of *Dress Suits to Hire* in 2005, emphasizes:

> Such exchanges [between Case and Hughes], along with numerous other writings by Kate Davy, Rebecca Schneider, Lynda Hart, and Vivian M. Patraka, placed *Dress Suits*, and the work of Holly Hughes and Split Britches more broadly, at the center of

> some of the most rich and performative battles on appropriation, reception, and identity in feminist performance during the late 1980s and early 1990s. (106)

The discourse surrounding *Dress Suits to Hire* in many ways epitomizes the feminist "sex wars." On the one hand, feminists are worried about presenting a unified front in the larger cultural arena; Case expresses her reticence for openly discussing lesbian feminist politics in a larger medium, "I am not certain that a debate among feminists (worse, lesbians) should appear outside of journals specifically allied with the movement and the critique (such as *Signs* or *Women and Performance*) . . ." ("A Case Concerning Hughes" 10), while on the other hand fervently disagreeing to the degree that one's identifications are denied, "Postmodern slippage is one thing and lesbian sexuality on a banana peel is another. For me, Hughes's interview and play beg the questions of what is a lesbian play and how that is determined" (Case and Hughes 11). Additionally, reception and assimilation of lesbian performances revolves heavily around the issues of pornography and coercion. The Schneider/Hughes interview as well as Kate Davy's article *Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative: "Dress Suits to Hire"*, Jill Dolan's *Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat*, and Elinor Fuch's *Staging the Obscene Body*, played a large role in *TDR*'s Spring 1989 volume revolving around sexuality and performance (the other journal articles explored the work of Annie Sprinkle and Frank Moore). In 1989, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was slapped with content-based restrictions from Congress, and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, canceled Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Perfect Moment* exhibit, fearing that they would no longer be eligible for funding if the exhibit continued. The line between art and pornography was being drawn with the feminist sex wars in the middle of it all.

Case, while watching *Dress Suits to Hire* at the University of Michigan, worried about:

> a large number of students who were either on dates, or at least appeared to be sitting in gendered pairs, watching actors I had always admired generally accompanied by lesbian hoots and whistles. . . . I wonder what some young male students saw when Weaver and Shaw came on in their feathered boas, high heels, and garter belts. What was the men's frame of reference for these images?" ("A Case Concerning Hughes" 11)

Obviously, Case was worried about the reception of the play having more to do with prurient interest and objectification of Weaver and Shaw: "Tardily, I became aware. . . . I was dismayed at the glee of the audience, who seemed challenged by nothing and entertained by much" ("A Case Concerning Hughes" 12). But could it be that it was Case who was unable to move behind her identity politics and definitions in order to embrace the complexities and contradictions within *Dress Suits to Hire*?

Dress Suits to Hire takes place in a small storefront, a clothing rental boutique in New York City. As the audience enters the auditorium, we are able to view the set. It is intimate, cramped—almost—with racks of clothing surrounding shop windows. The shop has several windows, but the largest window is placed downstage and is open, allowing the audience to peer into the shop. The open window differs from the others, which are covered but opened and closed throughout the performance. The set designer, Joni Wong (who also designed the lighting), exposes not only the metaphoric fourth wall with her set design, but disrupts the reading and viewing practices of the audience as well. Wong's design exposes the possibilities of prurient viewing through coercing us (the audience) into "peeking." We are clearly about to embark on a private occasion between two women, but we have been caught with our hand in the cookie jar—we are seen being seen.

There is little doubt that, while touring, productions change. Even as the setting, lighting, costumes, and blocking are masterfully reproduced and reestablished within the new venue, in some cases the size and shape of the venue do not allow for the complete transformation of the space. Both Kate Davy and Sue Ellen Case speak to the differences of the intimate WOW Café, PS 122, or Women's Interart, and the "Wagnerian 'mystic gulf'" of the University of Michigan presentation that Davy describes in *Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative: "Dress Suits to Hire"* (163). Even Alker, at Split Britches' twenty-fifth anniversary production of *Dress Suits for Hire*, discusses the importance of space for this particular production: "*Dress Suits* thrives on the suffocating and empowering nature of intimacy, both between its two characters and with the audience" (109). The lack of intimacy because of the theater at the University of Michigan should have been more prominent within Case and Davy's discourse of reception that evening. While Davy admits, "Because Shaw could not close the gap and indicate precisely the spectators she was addressing, it was not difficult to apply a dominant culture model, read from that perspective, and engage in fetishizing the image" ("Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative" 163), she continues in the footnote, "Since some felt the university context radically reshaped the reception of *Dress Suits*, it was suggested that the piece be performed exclusively in lesbian or women-only performance spaces. . . . The production circumstances in Ann Arbor made manifest the risk involved in that move [out of the lesbian ghetto]" ("Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative" 168). But the ghetto does not guarantee an activated spectatorship even if the ghetto provides common socio-historical context, shared language, and empathy – the very things lesbian camp (de)constructs – it is the production elements and performance strategies that ultimately transform the occasion into community. And with success in other academic

settings, such as Lancaster University in the UK and the University of Texas at Austin, as well as successful performances in diverse performance venues throughout the United States (Milwaukee and Santa Fe) and the United Kingdom (London), it is my belief that the major obstacle between spectator and performer at the University of Michigan performance was not so much the perceived selling out or assimilation of Holly Hughes, Lois Weaver, and Peggy Shaw, but rather the ill-chosen performance space.

Let me be clear, *Dress Suits to Hire* is a transformative production. It uses lesbian camp strategies is a variety of ways (to be discussed shortly); however, it is important not only to the feminist discourse revolving around reception and the feminist "sex wars," but the University of Michigan experience is also valuable to the lesbian camp artists as they explore performance and an activated spectatorship. It has become plainly obvious that many of the camp strategies employed in *Dress Suits to Hire* did not work in a large performance venue. Had the production been able to create a more intimate setting – possibilities included moving the entire production into the space between the stage and the audience, or moving the audience onto the stage, or moving the performance to a smaller, less formal venue – the discourses revolving around assimilation and reception would have been very different.

Hughes's, Weaver's, and Shaw's endeavor to step outside the lesbian ghetto, to perform for diverse audiences is not a step back into the closet nor is it a determination of success. The performers' move out of the ghetto, out of the safety of their communities, frankly, comes down to responsibility. The Combahee River Collective said it most succinctly, "We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us" ("The Combahee River Collective" 212). These performers

produced their lives, their truths, their experiences in diverse venues because it was political, because it was necessary. In the afterword to *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, Weaver explains, "We act out of necessity, we transform accidents and obstacles into transforming solitions… Art enables us to imagine ourselves out of current situations. We have only begun to imagine the potential…" (304). However, wrapped up in Case's, and to a lesser extent Davy's, anxiety over lesbian performance reception outside the confines of feminist and/or lesbian venues is pornography. And one can easily find several examples of where "misreading," as Davy calls it, could potentially happen in *Dress Suits to Hire*. One such example happens midway through the performance, when Weaver plays to the pornographic as her character dons a "filmy peignoir" and begins to sing (the tune reminiscent of *The Threepenny Opera*'s "Pirate Jenny"):

> Bugs are bitin'
>
> Fish are jumpin'
>
> When my baby starts a humpin' me.
>
> Hot cross buns
>
> Always beg for jam
>
> Every beaver
>
> Needs a beaver dam.
>
> Taste of fish,
>
> Taste of chicken,
>
> Don't taste like the girl I'm lickin.
>
> She puts the cunt back in country,
>
> Pulls the rug out from under me.

In case you are wondering,

She can put the what she wants in me . . . (Hughes *Clit Notes* 140-141)

The lesbian desire cannot be contained or ignored. And while lesbian sex is one of the more popular themes in heterosexual pornography, *Dress Suits* does not ignore the heterosexual prurient or pornographic possibility. Instead, *Dress Suits* uses popular camp strategies to disrupt the heteronormative gaze: incongruous juxtaposition between "Pirate Jenny" tune and the song's words and the striptease act lacking the striptease ("actions are flirtatious *as if* she were stripping" [*Clit Notes* 140]). The song purposely straddles the border between the sexy and the bawdy, using lesbian double entendres to disrupt the heteronormative gaze while also complicating lesbian sex and sexuality, going beyond the lickin' to include the stickin'—*Dress Suits* is unforgiving to all.

But why does pornography matter? In 1990, Holly Hughes along with three other artists (Karen Finley, Tim Miller, and John Fleck) were defunded from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). By defunded, I mean that after the artists proposals were successful in the peer review process, the director of the NEA, John Frohnmayer rejected the peer review boards recommendation, pulling the funds from the four artists. Historian Richard Meyer describes the aftermath: "In the wake of Frohnmayer's decision, Republican politicians and fundamentalist preachers attacked the work of these four performers (now referred to as the 'NEA Four') as indecent, obscene, and pornographic" (544). Hughes', as well as the other WOW Café performers', work was deemed pornographic and illegitimate but more importantly, since their work dealt with their desires, their fears, their dreams, the pornography debates affected lesbian representation. Jill Dolan succinctly states, "Pornography is an important locus for feminist critical thought because it provides a site

for the intersection of feminist sexual politics and the politics of representation" ("Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat" 59). And while Dolan does not actively participate in the *Dress Suits* discourse, she does build on Teresa de Lauretis' article "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," as do Case and Davy in their articles "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" and "Fe/Male Impersonation: The Discourse of Camp" (respectively). As discussed in Chapter II, Case and Davy agree with Dolan's assertion that lesbian performance and spectatorship have potential to disrupt the heteronormative gaze because, "this context allows lesbian desire to circulate as the motivating representational term. The subject/object relations that trap women performers and spectators as commodities in a heterosexual context dissolve. The lesbian subject . . . disrupts dominant cultural discourse representation mandates" (Dolan "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat" 63-64).

For all three critics, the WOW Café and other lesbian performance venues become the site for exploration of lesbian subjectivities, representations, and spectatorship: Sue Ellen Case focuses on the butch-femme relationship; and Kate Davy also explores the butch-femme relationship in performance as well as distinctly lesbian metaphors, scenarios, and conventions. However, Dolan, at this point, while excited about the utopian possibilities of lesbian spectatorship warns, "Changing the shape of desire from heterosexual to lesbian won't get the entire crisis of representation off our backs. There is no universal lesbian spectator to whom each lesbian representation will provide the embodiment of the same lesbian desire. Sexuality, and desire, and lesbian subjects are more complicated than that" ("Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat" 65). And again, lesbian artists aren't just interested in performing in their own communities. Lesbian performance artist Lisa Kron insists, "We

[lesbians] learned then that part of the responsibility for bringing lesbian work to a larger audience lay with us" ("A Straight Mind").

As stated earlier, *Dress Suits*, like many lesbian camp performances, establishes an activated audience immediately through its set design. The audience, entering the auditorium/performance space cannot simply take a voyeuristic approach in the atmosphere created by Wong. Additionally, as the audience enters, there is illumination for the spectator to find her/his seat. The illumination acts not only as a safety mechanism but as a type of social barometer as well. The spectator cannot enter as an individual in the dark; rather s/he is entering into a community of the occasion. While this type of illumination is standard convention within performance practices, it becomes an exaggerated social mechanism due to Wong's scenic choice of windows that expose the spectator as voyeur. We take our seats, entering into a world that Wong has created for us; a world that is estranged with the simultaneous need to look and be looked at. This particular estrangement, the watcher being watched, is consistent throughout *Dress Suits to Hire*; the spectator is coerced into subverting the heteronormative gaze.

The lights fade out of preshow. As the lights fade up on the stage, the front of the house is dark. Two women are seated—one facing upstage and one facing downstage. They are dressed in similar robes. After silently toasting one another with a glass of sherry, the woman facing downstage begins to sing. Slowly she begins to dress: one stocking and then the other. She glances up to see the other looking. The second's look is filled with desire. The first stops dressing and returns the look, and begins to dress again. The first woman is interrupted by death; however, the occasion repeats itself moments later. The woman facing downstage begins to dress again. As she dresses she tells a story, her story—the story of

herself and her mother; as she dresses she rises placing one leg after the other onto the chair, snapping her stockings into place, smoothing her stockings down her leg. She stares at the other woman who is staring back at her. Desire oozes from their looks. Davy describes moments like this in *Dress Suits* as locating, "the site and recipient of the gaze as feminine . . . the apparatus is made aware of itself—woman looks back" ("Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative" 157). The act of looking back (re)establishes subjectivity in the individual, but in the case of performance the act of looking back disrupts the gaze, as a connection is made between performer and spectator. The spectator is seen looking and, as Davy stated, the apparatus in exposed. In the case of *Dress Suits*, it is more than just woman looking back, it is Peggy Shaw/Deeluxe looking back; it is lesbian returning the look. Therefore, the heteronormative gaze is disrupted and lesbian subjectivity is (re)claimed.

Dress Suits to Hire also engages in the disruption of identity politics and lesbian butch-femme roles. Shaw, Weaver, and Hughes's exploration of butch-femme and their destabilization of identities is what I find most fascinating about *Dress Suits to Hire*, but it is also, I believe, what frustrated Sue Ellen Case. For Case, the lack of *traditional* butch-femme roles seemed to result from Hughes's, Shaw's, and Weaver's escape from the lesbian ghetto. They were selling out. However, as Hughes points out in her interview with Schneider, "I don't think Michigan and Deeluxe are two femmes. . . . Look at Peggy Shaw! She's wearing a dress but look at her body, man! She's like drop dead Martina!" (176). For Hughes, Shaw, and Weaver, *Dress Suits* was about the exploration of role playing: butch, femme, and drag .

In her pioneering article, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," Sue Ellen Case states, "The closet has given us camp—the style, the discourse, the *mise en scene* of butch-femme roles"(189). Case's radical view of butch-femme and her own identity politic of butch

materialist feminist lesbian were considered radical in the 1970s and early 1980s feminism. But Case, like many feminist lesbians in her position, found themselves caught between the performances of lesbian camp and the identity politic of butch-femme. In the case of *Dress Suits to Hire*, Hughes, Weaver, and Shaw genderfucked not only the heteronormative unities of gender, sex, and sexuality, but the lesbian ones as well.

Butch-femme lesbians suffered a great deal of criticism from both their feminist and lesbian allies throughout the 1970s and 80s. Their (butch-femmes) relationships had begun to be read as impersonations of classic heterosexual normativity: the butches wore the pants, typically worked in blue collar manufacturing positions (if they could get a job), and sexually pleased their femmes, while the femmes had the ability to find white collar jobs, and pass as heterosexual women—appearance was everything.[36] And while it is possible that the androgynous movement within lesbian feminism began as an opportunity to break away from the seemingly stringent roles of the butch-femmes, it turned into an all out crusade to illegitimate the butch-femme lesbian.

Butch-femme relationships were dangerous to the feminist movement because they were visible representations of lesbian desire. Viewing a butch-femme couple holding hands at a feminist march could create a public relations nightmare for many mainstream feminist groups. Butches and femmes were damned if they did and damned if they didn't; by herself, she would face the ridicule as either a male wannabe or an anti-feminist conformist. Joan Nestle, cofounder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives—an archive devoted to gathering and

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[36] For further reading on pre 1960s lesbian butch-femme relationships see Elizabeth Lapovsky and Madeline D. Davis Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

preserving records of lesbian culture—attended the Barnard conference, where she called out the feminist attacks of butch-femme lesbians, stating:

> The real problem here is that we stopped asking questions too early in the lesbian and feminist movement, and rushed to erect what appeared to be answers into the formidable and rigid artifice that we have now. Our contemporary lack of curiosity also affects our view of the past. We don't ask butch-fem women who they are; we tell them. ("The Femme Question" 234)

In her conference presentation, *The Femme Question*, Nestle was fighting the cultural definitions of woman and lesbian, as she spoke to the desires of lesbians (as seen through her experiences as a femme) as something more than a utopian theory but of a messy, difficult, corporeal history. She began to expose the misreadings from mainstream feminism through her own personal experiences as a femme as well as through her research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Nestle spoke to the performativity of roles, specifically stating that they were not copies of heterosexual couplings, but "a lesbian language of stance, dress, gesture, love, courage, and autonomy"(232). She spoke to a dialogue that would later inform not only the academy but the performing arts and liberatory politics for decades. Nestle, maybe not as theoretically eloquent as Judith Butler, exposed gender as a performance and, in her case, one closely aligned with sexual desire. Butler would later aid Nestle's argument, stating, "Disciplinary productions of gender effects a false stabilizations of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulations of sexuality"(*Gender Trouble* 135). Nestle made feminists and social conservatives alike uncomfortable with the erotic dance she portrayed, specifically between herself and her butch lover, as well as generally between the outwardly gendered lesbians as she spoke of the determination to walk between the lines of

iconic beauty, passing, and the pleasures of the female body not for purposes of reproduction, but as "mistresses of discrepancies, knowing that resistance lies in the change of context" (Nestle "The Femme Question" 236).

Discrepancies and changing contexts form the beginning of a consciousness of gender which acknowledges gender as a flexible construct instead of natural phenomenon. Butler states it best when she exclaims:

> As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody of mechanism of that construction. (*Gender Trouble* 138)

Like female impersonation in gay male culture, butch women's outward appearances possess codes; but unlike the female impersonator, the butch code signals her attraction to a certain type of woman and her desire for tasting lipstick in the kiss, the soft skin of her face, the long nails against her back, or the long hair pressed against the pillow. Nestle believes that butch women don't want to impersonate men, nor do they want to be male; instead, butch women are physically demonstrating their desire through a specific system of signs for other women. Femme women have similar capabilities of exposing the heterosexual paradigm because they dissolve normative culture's established interpretation of woman and lesbian. Femmes defy the stereotype of the frumpy lesbian, confront the style of flannel, and exude sex and sexuality, but not for the pleasure of men. To be visible, to expose that which

society would rather sweep under the rug, is not to conform. The butch-femme couple is a blatant denial of heterosexual normativity culminating in expanding definitions of woman, broadening identities of lesbian, and asserting woman as sexual beings.

Split Britches and Holly Hughes work through butch-femme roles as well as lesbian sexuality in *Dress Suits to Hire* with a twist. Hughes wrote this play for Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw. *Dress Suits to Hire* is a love story. It is as much an exploration of Weaver and Shaw's relationship off stage as it is onstage. Hughes explains, "First of all, the fact that Lois and Peggy had been lovers for years removed my primary motivation for writing: getting girls. It was hard for me to imagine why someone would go to all the work to write a play if there was absolutely no chance she would get laid as a result. What was the point" (*Clit Notes* 113-14). Hughes, Shaw, and Weaver complicate the visual codes of butch-femme as they explore lesbian sexuality through infinite possibilities. In typical lesbian camp fashion, *Dress Suits* becomes an exploration of lesbian culture from the inside out, as it exposes dynamics of power, desire, and control within a lesbian relationship.

As stated earlier, the performance begins with the performers—Shaw as Deeluxe and Weaver as Michigan—seated next to one another, a small table with two glass of sherry between them. Michigan's chair faces upstage while Deeluxe's chair faces downstage. While sitting opposite one another, we notice that they are dressed similarly in heavy dressing gowns. After a silent toast between one another, Deeluxe sets her glass down and begins to put on a pair of stockings while singing about the things she would like to do to herself: fill her mouth with red wine, her head with cement, her nose with cocaine.

Her act of dressing is subverted by her singing. The contrast between her deep, rough vocalization and the silky smoothness of the stockings betrays a stable identity. As she

stands, we are again taken with the contrast between her surface femininity and the towering (over six feet in heels) woman with strong facial features, legs, and arms. Deeluxe betrays the silk stockings and garter—is she in drag? It is still unclear as the dressing ritual is explicit—a ritual repeated again even in performance. It is not until Deeluxe is strangled with her own hand (we learn that later it is Little Peter, a man, inhabiting Deeluxe's arm that has strangled her) that we begin to see the complexity of this production. In fact, Weaver/Michigan opens a direct line of communication with the audience. Does this moment embrace the Split Britches' tradition of "stepping out"—when actor drops character in order to deal with an emotional or political moment within the script—or is it Michigan who sees us (the audience) when she speaks to Deeluxe's hand: "I suppose you know what this will mean. There will be no show. She will be unable to do the show. You're not going to like this" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 116). Weaver/ Michigan's dialogue places the spectators in an activated position; while looking through the shop window (the fourth wall): Weaver/Michigan has brought us into her world, acknowledging our existence, and not allowing us to be passively looking. But the act does more than expose our complicity of looking, Weaver/Michigan is establishing a contract between the performance and the spectators; she is giving us permission to create identifications with the occasions presented within the performance—to acknowledge our own contradictions, our own identity politics, our own desires and needs.

Deeluxe's death forces Michigan to contact the authorities. Michigan does so on a pink telephone minus its cord and receiver (another clue into their confined lives):

> There's a man in here . . . I can't say if he's dangerous or not. I don't know any other man so I can't compare . . . through the door! He lives with us. More with her than

> with me. Me, this man, and the body . . . yes, there certainly is a body . . . did I discover it? Many years ago. I first discovered the body in the Hotel Universal in Salamanca. A single light bulb. The light came in through the window. The streets were lit by little oranges. The oranges were perfect and bitter. In this light I lay down on the bed and discovered the body. Especially the legs. She's part palomino. In the legs, pure palomino. Do you know what a palomino is? . . . a racehorse covered in Parmesan cheese, yes. That's her. And after the first time I would discover the body again and again. And ever when I hate her, I love the body . . . who does the body belong to? Partly to me. It belongs to her. I usually say she's my sister, and most of the time we are sisters. Sometimes we're even worse. . . . (Hughes *Clit Notes* 116-17)

Through her conversation with the authorities, Michigan reveals her desire for Deeluxe. Once again, Hughes, Weaver, and Shaw confront the invisibility of lesbian desire that existed in mainstream feminism. They use images of racehorses and oranges to express the intensity of desire and sexuality. When Michigan is claiming her partial ownership of Deeluxe's body, it is not about a hierarchical power; instead it is about pleasure—the pleasure they receive from one another and Michigan's ownership of her pleasures with Deeluxe.

We must not mistake the lack of hierarchical power as a synonym for no power; rather what Michigan is exposing is a non-hierarchical, non gender-based power that derives from their sexuality and desire for one another. Traditional butch-femme roles possessed meanings within their gender performativity: butch lovers were supposed to be the leaders/ pleasers in bed while the femme role was to be pleased. Lesbians often joke amongst themselves about the possibility of the gendered role reversals in and out of the bedroom with the saying, "butch in the streets is femme in the sheets." Michigan's monologue is just

the beginning of the *Dress Suits* disruption of the strict identity politics of butch-femme, as moments later Michigan would continue:

> Is it cold in here or is it me? (To Deeluxe) Oh, it's you. You should relax. You know there are worse things in New York than being killed by someone who loves you. Like trying to cash a check! Are you mad at me because I said your body belongs to me? (Michigan kneels down and opens Deeluxe's robe.) Remember the night we became sisters? I looked out and there were no more stars. The sky was full of teeth. Blue and sharp, and it was closing in around us.
>
> Our only chance was to become twins. To be swallowed whole. But being twins slowed us down. People don't rent dress suits from twins.
>
> But then there was always the body to come back to. I'm not going to look at you any longer. I got to look where I am going. I never thought I would have to go anywhere. (Hughes *Clit Notes* 117)

This time, power over Deeluxe's body is direct. As she opens Deeluxe's robe, she begins to caress and then undress Deeluxe, pulling her shoes off one at a time, unsnapping her garters, peeling her nylons off her legs. She is in control of Deeluxe's body and the air is highly charged with Michigan's desires. Michigan is not mimicking a ritual body cleansing; she is lusting after Deeluxe.

Michigan continues performing between the visible and invisible, using familiar terms to describe her affair with Deeluxe. Lesbians are often asked if they are sisters, as it is often difficult for heteronormative culture to read homosexuality. When two women lovers are in public, while they may not hold hands or make out on the street corner, people recognize the familiarity they have with one another. "Sisters" becomes the easiest and safest

connection heteronormative culture can make. But *Dress Suits to Hire* takes sisterhood one step further, allowing lesbian, feminist, and heteronormative connotations of sister to entangle. There is the dynamic of Michigan speaking to the police, potentially wanting it to appear that they were sisters. There is also a facet of respect between Michigan and Deeluxe ("most of the time we are sisters"), potentially meaning that there is love and respect even through disagreement—they become family. At the same time, Michigan cannot let either of those two sit comfortably; instead preferring to make visible lesbian desire, "Sometimes we're even worse. . . ."

In the latter part of the monologue, Michigan directly correlates sisterhood with lesbian desire as she remembers the night they became lovers. This night was different than the night at the Hotel Universal. It was not tender or sensual. This night becomes a metaphor for a partnered life of a lesbian: turbulent and intense, animalistic, dense, and raw. It was intimidating and yet exciting. And their actions held consequences, but ones that Michigan was willing to work through so long as "there was always the body to come back to."

But Deeluxe's body is complicated. As stated earlier, she gives off contesting signs. When Michigan states, "There's a man in here . . . I can't say if he's dangerous or not. I don't know any other man so I can't compare . . . through the door! He lives with us. More with her than with me," she is referring to Little Peter, embodied in Deeluxe's hand, but the audience has yet to be introduced to Little Peter. Just as in Shaw's other performances, the layering of character upon character upon individual disrupts any notion of stability. And in the case of this scene in *Dress Suits*, Shaw layers Deeluxe and "the man" upon herself, which results in a masculine female to feminine female to male drag performance. Once again,

Dress Suits is exposing the contradictions and tensions within lesbian and feminist identity politics as they layer "the man" with multiple points of identification. For some, "the man" will be read as a metaphor for the greater culture's mores on lesbianism: the inverted female. For others, it may be the deeper, darker side to lesbian identity: the violent butch lover. But it is also a form of masculinity Deeluxe has deep inside her that she has yet to reconcile.

The above scene explores the theoretical—*One is Not Born a Woman*—through the genderfucking of Deeluxe and Michigan. For as Monique Wittig states in an article titled the same, "lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man" (20). Nor is lesbian a man. The frontier by which lesbians find themselves, navigating amongst the masculine/feminine, Wo/Man, and male/female dichotomies, is placed in tension within one another throughout *Dress Suits. Dress Suits* uses repetition (Deeluxe's dressing) to expose the unities of gender, sex, and sexuality as false. Deeluxe's unities are constantly shifting, resting only for moments on gender or sexual play that is incongruously juxtaposed with her last moment. The butch-femme coupling of Shaw and Weaver—of what Split Britches was known—still exits but is, at the same time, being dismantled through the same expression of desires. Michigan and Deeluxe purposely place into tension all identifications, preferring to embrace the conflicts within identifications rather than maintaining the strict identity politics of Case's (and others) butch-femme feminist lesbians. *Dress Suits*, as with the majority of lesbian camp performances, refuses to let one institution take the place of another. Hughes confirms the need to challenge our own assumptions in her response to Case:

> Ms. Case is very clear about this: lesbianism is a club. . . . Thank you for showing us that lesbianism is a tree house looking down on dominant culture's backyard, that patriarchal desert. Everybody wants in, you know how it is these days, everyone wants in to our club. We've got to keep the entrance requirements stiff to keep out the bad element. . . . O please, Ms. Case, let me into the club! I know I'm a naughty, naughty bisexual and a professional dominatrix to boot. . . . Ms. Case, you know what it's like to get kicked out of the lesbian clubhouse. Didn't you identify yourself as a butch? But my dear Ms. Case. Ten years ago that was taboo in the clubhouse. . . . ("A Case Concerning Hughes" 15-16)

Dress Suits to Hire was a timely production. Case and, to a lesser extent, Davy bristled at the production because it refused to allow traditional butch-femme roles to be the status quo. Case writes, "Although, at the time, my objection had strictly to do with the context of reception of the piece, there was also something in the text itself that disturbed me and foregrounded the conditions of reception… In other words, *Dress Suits* does not seem to grow out of a feminist, or lesbian tradition of writing" ("A Case Concerning Hughes" 10-11). *Dress Suits* revealed a much more complex lesbian subjectivity than Case or Davy had anticipated. It, in many ways, exposed Hughes's, Shaw's, and Weaver's own dance between butch-femme as performance and political strategy, and butch-femme as performativity of their desire and sexualities.

Little Peter's first vocal appearance continues to contribute to the butch-femme discourse *Dress Suits* has established. From Deeluxe's hand comes Little Peter with severity in word and action. The hand pulls at Deeluxe's hair, slaps her face, and fondles her body. Little Peter's violence and aggression does little to draw Deeluxe to him; instead Michigan

explains, "That tiger was getting the best of Little Peter, and he didn't even know it. We just called her a tiger 'cause there weren't words for what she was. Half woman, half something weird. French, maybe. All cat" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 123). This tiger inside of Deeluxe scared her. When Michigan asked for her hand, Deeluxe would not give her the right hand, Little Peter's hand. She denies to Michigan that it is her hand even after Michigan has confronted her:

> MICHIGAN. That one you were born with, and this the one you made for yourself. Give.
>
> DEELUXE. It is not mine to give.
>
> MICHIGAN. What?
>
> DEELUXE. It's not MY hand!
>
> MICHIGAN. What could it be then?
>
> DEELUXE. It could be anything. It works against me. I have no feeling in it. And it's not an "it." It's a he. He does what he wants and when he wants. He's an underground river that empties into my heart. (Hughes *Clit Notes* 124-25)

Deeluxe is struggling with her desires toward women, specifically how they manifest themselves. It is as though she is unable to wade through the complexities of lesbian desire and butch-femme performance. Once again, Shaw does not disguise her butchness even as she layers Deeluxe on top of her performativity, just as Weaver's Michigan, while aggressive and stimulated, does not obfuscate her femininity. Therefore, when Deeluxe is overcome with her desire for Michigan, and must first negotiate the territory with Little Peter, the sanctity of butch-femme coding erodes. The disruption becomes more about diffusing butch-femme roles as caricature, preferring to explore the underbelly of lesbian relationships

with its shifts in power and performativity that typically remain invisible to the outsider. *Dress Suits to Hire* "present[ed] a living lesbian relationship on the stage with all of its difficulties and all of its darkness, not just as a celebration" (Weaver "Interview with Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw").

Dress Suits to Hire ends with Michigan and Deeluxe returning to the two chairs. Little Peter has left a note for Deeluxe which begins, "Dear Deeluxe, You asked about the future. Here's the deal: it's gonna be just like the past. . . ." (Hughes *Clit Notes* 150). Only this time as Michigan pours the two glasses of sherry, Deeluxe is sitting the chair facing upstage and Michigan is sitting in the chair facing downstage. Some things have already begun to change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Sixteen years ago, I had my first experience with lesbian camp, when Holly Hughes arrived on the campus of Wells College. Her performance of *Clit Notes* changed the direction I took as an academic, theater practitioner, feminist, and lesbian. She became my hero, the mistress of a feminist lesbian theater that explored feminist and lesbian theories and practices that were complex, messy, incongruous, and political while at the same time humorous, accessible, and joyful. Even as she became the poster child for the religious conservatives' attack on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), homosexuality, and feminism, Hughes channeled her anger and frustration into performances that are brave and, according to New York Times reviewer Ben Brantley, "based on equal urges to ingratiate and confront, is often fiercely funny. Her unorthodox use of both verbal and body language can put an energizing spin on the commonplace" (18).

As I began to sit in the theaters, performance spaces, lobbies, and classrooms with others from inside and out of my communities, I began to realize that this type of theater touched more than just me—more than just feminist lesbians. Performances seemed to provoke thought and conversation from diverse communities. Yet the performance criticism I was reading at the time from lesbians and feminists like Kate Davy and Sue Ellen Case did not embrace the diversity found in lesbian camp performances, preferring instead to

advocate for the lesbian *ghetto* audience(s) and prioritize the differences between lesbian/gay, lesbian/ feminist, male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual.

This study has always been both personal and political. It stems from my deep admiration for Holly Hughes as well as my need to develop what I saw when I sat in the seats, read the scripts, and watched the videos. I was maturing as a lesbian, woman, and scholar as lesbian camp was maturing, and what I saw read and viewed seemed so radically different from the lesbian and/or feminist critics I was reading. Lesbian camp seemed to be leading the charge in a different direction from the feminist and lesbian dramas of Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, Tina Howe, Rachel Rosenthal, Wendy Wasserstein, Carol Churchill, Megan Terry, Jane Chambers, Adrienne Kennedy, or Rosalyn Drexler (all of whom I respect). In the course of doing this study, I found lesbian camp, like me, to be complicated and filled with contradictions and incongruities. This study did more than just define lesbian camp, articulate strategies for an activated spectatorship, and dance with lesbian and feminist theories and practices during the feminist sex wars. This study also included a wish to articulate lesbian camp's influence on third wave feminist and queer thought.

This study has only begun to explore the ways in which queer performances in the 21st Century engage their spectators. Possibilities for further study include exploration of an activated spectatorship and citizenship in alternative performances like poetry slams, modern burlesque, and lesbian standup comedy. What is the relationship between these alternative performances to third-wave feminist and queer theories and practices? What roles do performative technologies like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs play in the relationship between feminist and queer thoughts and alternative performances? What is the

relationship between these technologies and the spectators? Are these technologies capable of engaging and audience and creating the potential for an active citizenship?

In the following paragraphs, I define third-wave feminism and queer thought. I interpret the lesbian ghetto and its precarious position with the WOW Café. I return to *Dress Suits to Hire* as one occasion upon which the growing tension between queer and feminist readings are problematized, specifically in the queering of butch-femme roles through genderfucking. Lastly, I wonder where lesbian camp is today. I wonder what it is that we as artists and citizens can learn from lesbian camp performances.

Feminist activist Rebecca Walker popularized the term *third-wave feminism* in her 1992 article in *Ms. Magazine*. Walker defiantly ends the article by stating, "I am not a post feminist. I am the Third Wave"("Becoming the Third Wave" 41). Third-wave feminism is a rejection of post-feminism;[37] it is the rejection of the failure of feminism and the rejection of idea that there is no need for feminism. Third-wave feminism uses the foundation created by second-wave feminists and assumes certain rights and privileges won by second wave feminists (feminism is seen as a birthright). At the same time, it rejects second-wave feminism through disidentification with the earlier movement. "The identificatory relationship between second- and third-wave feminists, however, has as much to do with disidentifying as it does with identifying" (Henry 26). Third-wave feminists struggle with balancing political action with identity politics. Rebecca Walker explains that third-wave feminists,

> fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female

[37] For a closer look at the history and use of post-feminism, please read, Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004).

> against male, back against white, oppressed against oppressor. . . . For us the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities: including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching more than arriving. (*To Be Real : Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* xxxiii)

Disidentificatory strategies within third-wave feminism are a direct (re)consideration of the identity politics of the feminist sex wars. Third-wave feminists wanted and needed to step away from the feminist sex wars' polarizing issues. And due to the polarization of the feminist sex wars within the feminist movement, feminism has, for many women from 18-40, become the "f-word". In her book, journalist Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner explains:

> The f-word has been particularly hard hit by stereotype loading and inaccurate use. As a result, "Feminism" now has an outdated, '70s connotation–instead of shifting with the movement, the term has stayed stagnant, becoming one of the many stumbling blocks for a broad-based contemporary women's movement In fact, a central irony of this rejection of the label is that there is still broad support for the ideas set forth by feminism. (6-7)

And so feminism is changing. How feminism provokes political action is changing: "There will never be one platform for action that all women agree on. But that doesn't mean feminism is confused. What it does mean is that feminism is as various as the women it represents. What weaves a feminist movement together is consciousness of inequities and a commitment to changing them" (Baumgardner and Richards 47-48). How women and men define themselves as feminists is changing.

Disidentificatory strategies are also closely aligned with queer methodologies. In her introduction to *The Queerest Art*, Jill Dolan states, "Differences, multiplicities, gaps, contradictions, desires, sexualities—that is, the stuff of queerness" (Solomon and Minwalla 2). Queerness is similar to third-wave feminism in its contradictions, incongruities, and disidentifications. However, even as third-wave feminism focuses on cultural differences, exploration, and celebration, the deconstruction of desires is the geography of queerness. Journalist Frank Browning defines the geography of queerness as:

> Our [gay] voice, with rare exceptions, is a voice of the urban metropolis. *Gay community, gay ghetto, gay space*, have become common terms in the movement of gay liberation. They speak of the place that gay people have carved out for their survival. But there is another sense of place, of personal geography, that characterizes the queer impulse, and that is the place we afford homoeroticism in the larger shape of our lives. (2)

It is in the tension between community geography and personal geography that I declare, I am a third-wave queer feminist. I embrace the contradictions found in all aspects of my life. I relish the incongruities of my occasions of privilege and otherness. I take joy in my performativity of gender, sexuality, and sex. I live for the occasions in my life and art that lead to more questions than answers. I see the political in the personal and the passionate. And yet I must deny all that I embrace because as Holly Hughes asks, "Don't you hate it when people ask you why you are what you are? As if you had any idea?" (*Clit Notes* 208). My identifications *with* remain complicated and scratched.

Throughout this study, I have highlighted lesbian camp's strategies of disidentification, its incongruous juxtapositions, and its multiple-multiplicities. Additionally, I

explore the ways in which lesbian camp has exposed gender performativity, a core theory in queer theory. And, while I am fascinated and in awe with the work of Judith Butler, especially regarding gender performativity, I do not understand why she chose to look at gay male drag when exploring her concepts of gender performativity. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Split Britches were clearly exploring gender performativity well before Butler had begun to write about it (one of Butler's first articles was published in *Theatre Journal*'s December 1988 issue, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"). Was the WOW Café really a lesbian ghetto theater? Did it only serve its small East Village community? Or was Butler more interested in gay clubbing than lesbian performance?

As discussed in Chapter IV, lesbian camp's location in and out of the lesbian ghetto was prominent in Sue Ellen Case and Holly Hughes's public debate of *Dress Suits to Hire*. Feminist critic Lara Shalson defines ghetto as a term,

> used to refer to performance in which audience members and performers alike are considered, by themselves and/or others, to be part of a community on the basis of some shared attributes, such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity. The term "ghetto" is generally pejorative; performance in the ghetto is often stigmatized from both inside and outside the community as unable to make it in the mainstream because its appeal has not proved to be universal. (225)

Shalson's definition of the ghetto is exemplary. However, stating that the ghetto is "generally pejorative" is too simplistic a suggestion. While the ghetto "is often stigmatized," it is also, as Shalson states, a community based on shared politics, economics, social characteristics, and injustices. Gays and lesbians have queered the term by placing into tension its historical significance with a type of celebratory geography. The ghetto never forgets its history, nor

the prospect of violence, but at the same time, the ghetto works towards creating a safe environment for its members to express themselves (pride parades, gay and lesbian bookstores, T-shirt shops, bed and breakfasts, bars).

The WOW Café, in the East Village of New York City, played an important role in the lesbian ghetto of New York, but what makes the WOW Café different from other ghetto institutions is that its artists embraced the complexities of the ghetto. In an interview with Kate Davy, Peggy Shaw explains: "As a group, WOW does encourage everyone to perform. To develop material you have to be in a safe place. Once you develop it, then you can take it out and do it at other places" ("Shaw and Weaver Interviews" 1003). For Hughes, Tropicana, and Split Britches, WOW offered a home; it offered a space to explore and express their desires and fears. The members at the WOW Café became family as they listened, supported, and critiqued one another's work. But like all families, as the artists developed their performances, they sought a dialog and a connection to diverse audiences and communities.

As lesbian camp and its artists matured and their performances were being presented in larger and more diverse venues, new questions of assimilation and lesbian subjectivity re-emerged in feminist performance criticism. The collaboration between Holly Hughes, Peggy Shaw, and Lois Weaver in *Dress Suits to Hire* brought these questions to a broader audience (TDR's Spring 1989 issue). For me, the importance of the *Dress Suits* discourse is that *Dress Suits* became a transitional piece for feminist criticism and lesbian performance art. *Dress Suits* established its subjectivity using similar strategies of past Hughes and Split Britches performances, but *Dress Suits* was radical in that it turned its own strategies back on itself—a queering of the already queer lesbian camp. These queerings confused camp strategies while

also intimidating some of the feminist performance critics. One example of *Dress Suits* queering lesbian camp strategies is the way in which the performers approached the butch-femme relationship.

In Chapter II, I argued against Davy's and Case's conclusions in their articles "Fe/Male Impersonations: The Discourse of Camp" and "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (respectively) that stated the butch-femme couple, "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, but constantly seduce the sign system, through flirtation and inconstancy into a light fondle of artifice, replacing the Lacanian slash with a lesbian bar" (Case "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" 186). In other words, both Case and Davy believe that the butch-femme couple creates lesbian subjectivity through an, "artifice [that] . . . not only resists assimilation, because it is too dangerous, but it allows for the play of other differences as well. . . . When the butch-femme subject winks, phallocratic culture is not reassured" (Davy "Fe/Male Impersonation" 145). And while I agree that the butch-femme couple plays an important role in lesbian camp, I claimed that it was the genderfucking of the butch-femme couple and drag that found the crack or disruption in the heteronormative reading and viewing practices. *Genderfucking*, according to June L. Reich, contends that it, "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"(255). Genderfucking uses and abuses drag and the butch-femme couple to expose the unities of sex, sexuality, and gender as false. In Chapter II, I use the examples of Alina Troyano's transformation into Carmelita Tropicana as genderfucking working with drag, as well as Hughes's *Clit Notes* ("Her tits. They are just

relentless. The way they keep pushing through the [man's] white cotton [shirt] like a pair of groundhogs drilling through the February snow to capture their own shadows" [204]) as an example of genderfucking working with the butch-femme couple to destabilize notions of the authentic lesbian or the authentic butch-femme couple. In *Dress Suits to Hire*, Shaw, Weaver, and Hughes take genderfucking one-step further, this time using it to explore the construction of the butch-femme couple itself.

From the very beginning of the performance, *Dress Suits* (re)dresses Weaver and Shaw. Known for their butch-femme roles both on and off stage, Hughes complicates the couple by revealing them as simultaneously similar (both wearing the same style dressing gowns) and different (one faces upstage and the other faces downstage). The visual image is also simultaneously prurient and desexualized. It is not until Shaw/Deeluxe begins to dress that her body is exposed, and as Kate Davy points out, "[the] robes made from sturdy fabric that hangs from them in a way that hides their bodies" ("Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative" 157). However, the dressing gowns are intimate; the setting is private, and the looks are filled with desire—the performers caress the spectators into wanting more, needing more. The image becomes amplified as it coerces us into identifications *with* one or both of the performers. The effect does not mask the masculine/feminine—the butch/femme—nor does it disguise lesbian desire; rather, the effect is explosive. The cultural (albeit lesbian culture) construction of butch-femme has been dismantled. There is no longer the stone butch or lipstick femme. But at the same time, there is obviously no advocating for androgyny or a return to a utopian lesbian feminism. *Dress Suits* is anything but utopian. As explored in Chapter IV, its instability is the only stability within the performance. Power and desire shifts from Michigan to Deeluxe and back again. The performance not only disrupts

common heteronormative notions of butch-femme (a mimesis of heterosexual coupling), but also the lesbian institutionalization of the butch-femme in lesbian culture. In her interview with Schneider Hughes explains, "I wanted to explore things that are actual as opposed to posing some sort of utopian solution. . . . [*Dress Suits*] is this cat and mouse game. . . . Michigan is a femme, but of course she's not really femme. If you think of butch in terms of looks then she's femme, but if you think of the roles in the way they conduct their lives . . . she's definitely butch"(177-78).

It is not that difficult to understand why Davy and Case were frustrated with *Dress Suits*' genderfucking of Shaw's and Weaver's butch-femme roles, as butch-femme couples have always struggled for respect within the feminist movement,[38] and the feminist sex wars certainly heightened butch-femme concerns. Lesbian camp throughout the early 1980s tended to celebrate butch-femme, using it with genderfucking to disrupt heteronormative cultural assumptions. Therefore, when *Dress Suits* genderfucked one of its own strategies, Case, Davy, and others cried foul. And rather than remaining open to the occasion, these critics shut themselves off to the possibilities within the performance. They ended up attacking the performance with strident rhetoric of identity politics, trying to send the performers and performances back to the lesbian ghetto. But lesbian camp as a genre thrives on multiplicities and seeks to disrupt assumptions of all its spectators. It simultaneously celebrates and denies the ghetto, refusing to preach only to the converted. Lesbian camp operates from constantly shifting geographies and not an insider/ outsider standpoint.

[38] See Joan Nestle's "The Fem Question" in Carole S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger : Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984).

Rather than focusing on its otherness, lesbian camp explores and dismantles the very differences Case and Davy seek to reaffirm.

Leaving the ghetto is scary. Each artist has admitted as much in interviews, introductions, talkbacks, and articles. In *Clit Notes*, Hughes reminds us, "We're not safe. We're never safe, we're just. . . . You tell me" (208). And yet, I was continually surprised by the accessibility of lesbian camp. The WOW Café and its performers were as complicated as the work they produced. The WOW Café was a lesbian and feminist performance collective, open to any lesbian and feminist wishing to explore performance. The WOW was not a lesbian separatist venue like the Michigan Music festival, or even the lesbian separatist communes scattered throughout Southwestern Oregon; rather it was, as Carmelita Tropicana and Holly Hughes have both stated, a place to pick up women. The WOW was safe—safe from homophobia, safe from sexism, "safe from the male gaze but also from feminism convulsed by the sex wars. No one had to reclaim butch and femme; no one had renounced it. No one worried about losing funding; no one got any" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 15). The WOW was also a place that was fun, bawdy, and irreverent. "WOW was the place I'd always wanted to visit—the *mystery spot*. Here we were invisible from the beaten path. Going too far was the only way to go. WOW was a place where transformation was possible. A place where every moment began with the determination to defy the laws of nature" (Hughes *Clit Notes* 14). The combination of inclusiveness and irreverence carried through in performance. Lesbian camp is very much about lesbian subjectivity and lesbian experience, but at the same time, lesbian camp consistently leaves itself open to a wider and diverse audience. Throughout my explorations of lesbian camp, I found that its accessibility stems from its disassembly of identity politics; its impiety towards all institutions (including feminist and lesbian); its

deconstruction of binaries hetero/homo, wo/man, fe/male; and its joy found amidst its incongruities.

The joy found in lesbian camp derives from the incongruities explored, from the tensions between conflicting identifications, and from expression of desire. Joy is unexpected, especially in the politically charged lesbian camp. And yet it resides in the most political moments, emphasizing possibilities while never forgetting our–performer(s) and spectator(s)–verisimilitude. Moments of joy function similarly to the occasions of identification *with*—in some cases, the moments of joy are the moments where the spectators have identifications *with*. Joy makes the connection, creates the community, and compels dialogue, which in turn enables subjectivity of performer and spectator.

The joy found in Alina Troyano's performances of Carmelita Tropicana exists among the excess of multiple cultures, multiple customs, and multiple institutions of Cuban's America as well as America's Cuba (Tropicana Orange juice, Carmen Miranda, Chiquita® bananas, Tropicana Club . . .). In *Memories of a Revolution* and her later piece, *Milk of Amnesia*, Troyano/Tropicana explored the tensions between memory and history of her homelands (Cuba and the United States). Returning to the Our Lady of Charity scene in *Memories of a Revolution*, Troyano/Tropicana disrupts memory and heteronormative history by recycling the Cuban with the American, the religious with the secular, and the personal with the political. Troyano/Tropicana's weaving of her desires, cultural memories, and historic moments embraces "multi, multi, multi." She emphasizes multiple meanings, multiple readings, and multiple resources upon the occasion, which in turn disrupts the authenticity of culturally constructed histories, memories, and stereotypes—her Virgin Mary represents

peace *and* colonization, virgin *and* whore, traditional Christianity *and* Judaism *and* women-centered religious practices.

In Split Britches' *Beauty and the Beast*, the plot surrounds two histories of desire, identification, rejection, loss, comprehension, and transformation as the Beast continues to ask Beauty to marry. The beast becomes James Dean while the beauty becomes Katharine Hepburn (see Chapter III: "I always wanted to *be*" becomes "I *was*"):

> BEAUTY. I was Katharine Hepburn and the girl who lived down the hall from me my freshman year of college was (*taking on the character of Katharine Hepburn*) Spencer Tracy.
>
> BEAST. I was James Dean (*taking on the character of James Dean*) and when I slept with a woman for the first time she threw me out of bed on the floor and told me I was sick . . .
>
> . . .
>
> BEAUTY. One Christmas, Spencer brought me a white fur coat.
>
> BEAST. Not only did I have spinal meningitis, but I had mononucleosis, and the doctor told me I couldn't kiss a boy for a year (*She smiles broadly*)
>
> BEAUTY. My mother told me that I shouldn't accept expensive gifts from girls. But I wasn't worried. . . . She wasn't a girl, she was Spencer Tracy.
>
> BEAST. Then my girlfriend married a boy who thought *he* was James Dean. So I married a boy who thought he was Lauren Bacall.
>
> . . .
>
> BEAUTY. When we got home that evening the dorm mother was in the doorway, and she wanted to know just what had been going on.

BEAST. All my fantasies were turning into realities so I went to a shrink and I fell in love with her too.

. . .

BEAUTY. I found out later that she wasn't Spencer Tracy at all. I found out much later that I had been in love with her.

BEAST. Will you marry me, then, Beauty? (*Split Britches* 82-84)

From the top of the scene, Beauty and Beast establish fantasy identifications *with* James Dean and *with* Katharine Hepburn. As stated in Chapter III, these fantasy identifications also create the potential for spectators to substitute their own identifications with fantasies. The scene above also uses fantasy identifications to place into tension the nostalgia with the pragmatic. But even through the pain, the rejection, the misunderstandings, and the discrimination, there is joy that rises between the tensions, simultaneously accepting and denying. The joy frees the occasion of "either/or" in its acceptance of the "and." There is no Beauty or Beast, Shaw or Weaver, James Dean or Katharine Hepburn, heartbreak or romance, nostalgic or romantic. Rather, there is Beauty *and* Weaver *and* Hepburn. There is Shaw *and* Beast *and* Dean. There is nostalgia *and* romanticism *and* sobriety *and* reflection. The joy in lesbian camp resides in the "and."

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