

ARUDE

Iké Udés

STYLE
ART
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SCENES
& BEYOND

\$6 • Fall 1995 • Volume 1 Issue 2



Gender, God & RuPaul



Plus: joey arias • vaginal davis • diane torr • alan chou
erwin olaf • thierry mugler • octavia st. laurent • john kelly



PARDON OUR



APPEARANCE...

shop, she is taking up more space, just as Torr's stereotypical men do. For Crosby, it wasn't about passing. "It was about being in drag." Costume was her motivator. "I was transformed on the outside and the inside followed." Since the workshop, "I guess I'm a little more obnoxious," she said modestly. "I'm on the line as to whether it's enviable or not. In the sidewalk interaction, I can't tell if I want to be the person who doesn't get out of the way."

So if I stay on the sidewalk instead of stepping off, am I more of a man? Am I more masculine? Am I more butch? More powerful? Or am I just in the way? Someday, in New York, deference and politeness will be as universal as suffrage. Someday I will win the lottery. Someday

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"I don't believe in those notions of masculinity and femininity, they're a complete fiction. Femininity is something women feel they have to correspond with. It's a male idea of what women should be."



Photo: Gordon Fainsford
dave & lewis w



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E D I T O R ' S L E T T E R

Our society has become almost irredeemably divided in so many areas, particularly along the line of gender. For starters, prosaic admonitions tossed around such as "Act like a man", "She's too rough for a woman", "Boys don't cry", "She's a bitch", "He's too effeminate", etc. only assist in exacerbating the disunity and confusion plaguing us.

As we all know, a whole lot of absurd notions regarding what a man or woman should be/act like, defines our views on issues of gender identity. But how true is the notion of a man or a woman, based on appearance only? What if, or supposing that the person you are lusting after, in the end falsifies your presumptions, by contradicting your gender expectation? It can happen to you, assuming it hasn't.

aRUDE's Gender issue is not intended to serve as a definitive survey. Rather the aim of this issue is to serve as a commentary on the fixed notion, yet uncontrollably fluid nature of gender.

What are we to do, if we were to wake up one lovely day to discover that all the distinctions and signs such as public toilet, attires, behaviors, emotions, appearances, have become obsolete and inconsequential? What would then be the "definitive" mode of gender distinction and identification?

Our cover person, RuPaul extends and amends the meaning of gender. Look at the cover again. Isn't she a lovely woman? Of course, "she" is. But he's also a "handsome man". Is she (?) or Is he (?) RuPaul. Which is right or wrong? Neither. The likes of RuPaul, Grace Jones and Michael Jackson continue to challenge and problematize traditional notions of gender roles, representations, identifications and ideologies.

aRUDE is steadfastly committed to taking a substantial and unorthodox stance to issues and ideas that are often coarsely reduced to mere spectacle or sound bites, by the media.

The "HE" of gender is not separable from the "SHE". One is perpetually a fusion of the masculine and feminine. One is first and foremost an individual, not a particular gender. Gender is. Gender is not. Oh dear! Give free reign to the individual in you. One is every woman/man. Enjoy the fluid ride into an age of post gender -apartheid.



Obsequiously yours, Ike Udé.

aRUDE

is where it's at

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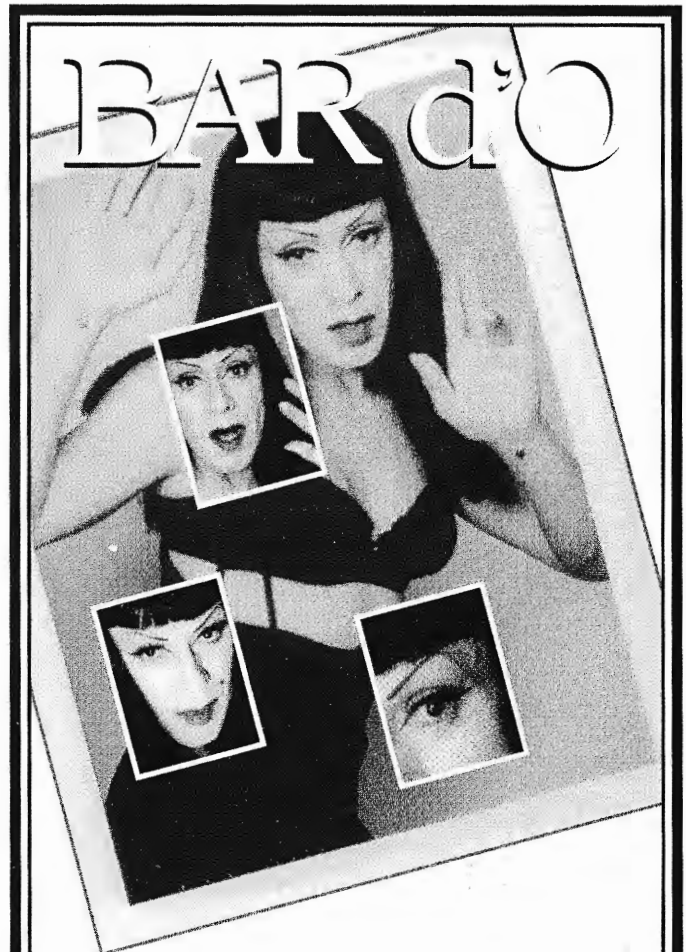
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ON THE COVER: RuPaul
Photographed by Iké Udé

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at "Wigstock" movie premiere party, LA
(L to R) Tony Frere & Udo Kier



at Black Nation, Queer Nation Conference, NY
(L to R) Issac Julien & Barbara Smith



at "Wigstock" movie premiere party, LA
(L to R) Jackie Beat, Alexis Arquette & Candy Ass



at "Wigstock" movie premiere party, LA
Mistress Formika (facing)

at "Wigstock" movie premiere party, LA
Kitty



at Time Cafe
Greg Tate at lunch



at Ike Ude's soiree
Stephen Greco



Tommy Gunn & friends at aRUDE party



at Florent
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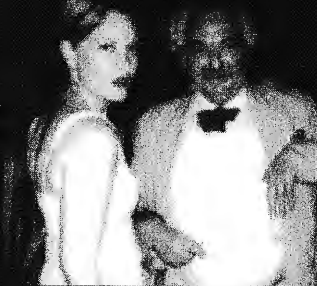


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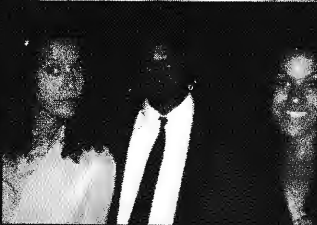
at aRUDE party
Charles Henry Ford & Chris Makos



at Gen Art fashion show
Mr. Kas & Sarah Allison



at aRUDE party
Rodrick Laverne & the Jones Twins (Stephanie & Susan)



at Gen Art party
Edwidge & Claudia Rapisarda





at Whitney Biennial opening
Lyle & Thomas Harris & Fran Seagull



at aRUDE party
Hamlet Manzueta, Serene & Rodrick LaVerne



at aRUDE party
Alex

at aRUDE party
(L to R) Janice, Lois & Tirmaj

at aRUDE party
Diable Faye & friend



at ICA, Boston
Jean Fisher & Lia Gangitano



at aRUDE party
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at aRUDE party
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PEKING OPERA

alan chou

by Yeh Hsiao-Wei

Alan Chou has been an important cultural figure in the Chinese-American Community for over 20 years. As the director of Chinese American Art Council who persistently promotes Chinese culture in the U.S., Alan Chou radiates the energy and passion of Chinese culture on stage. His once frequent, but now occasional performances of Peking Opera, especially in the ravishing role of "Yu Gi" (the Concubine in the famous repertoire "Farewell My Concubine") has charmed thousands of people across the country.

Inspired by his grandfather who was a connoisseur of Peking Opera, beginning at age seven Alan Chou started studying the Peking Opera in Taiwan. Dedicated, but never professionally bound, Alan Chou has performed hundreds of different roles, mostly female ones. Chou explains: "In Chinese theater, the designation of roles has nothing to do with one's biological sex. It all depends on your talent. Someone as myself was gifted with certain vocal quality which is able to sing the female tunes, therefore I was trained as a *Dan* (in the Female role)."

Traditionally in Peking Opera (the most-mentioned Chinese theater), the portrayal of women has been an exclusive male domain. Alan Chou disputed the charge that such representation exemplified the male projection and manipulation of ideas about ideal femininity. However, it reflects a severely gender-segregated Chinese society, where the interactions between women and men were discouraged in public space; a same-sexed performing troupe would evade such embarrassment or 'indecent' as any physical or emotional intimacy between male and female characters is required to be played out on stage.

What is left unveiled is the eroticized exchange, both symbolically and physically, between the mostly male spectators and the male-to-female impersonated performer. "It was a common practice among these 'Divas,' even as reverent as Mei Lung-Fan, the legendary

Peking Opera performance artist, to go out under the 'calls' of their powerful and wealthy patrons. Chinese men have been privileged with sexual freedom as opposed to the deprivation of sexual liberty to Chinese women. Having sex and fondling a man instead of a woman escalate the decadence and delicacy. It's a statement of taste and status," says Alan Chou.

Enjoying the reputation he has gained through his expertise in the interpretation of female characters since a young age, Alan Chou nevertheless, declines the association between cross-gender performance and his own sexual preference. "I discovered my sexual interest in men at 12 years old. It was in my nature. I can't deny it. But as to performing female roles, I acquired the skill through intense training: an elaborate repertoire of how to walk, talk, gesticulate, raise one's eyes and move one's limb like a lady. It's artistry and craftsmanship. I can play hundreds of roles and sing hundreds of repertoires without necessarily restricting myself to only female roles. Don't forget that I was famous for playing "*Monkey King*" when I was in Hong Kong."

Off stage, Alan doesn't enjoy the elaborate appearance required in theatrical performances. "I don't wear makeup or women's clothes in my daily life. It is too complicated for me. Men's clothes and women's clothes are social codes by which one can distinguish oneself from the other. That's tradition. I don't like to cross that boundary."

"The ultimate ideal male beauty throughout Chinese history typifies itself in the image of the intelligentsia: well cultivated, with refined features, lean and supple physique cloaked in beautifully embroidered robes. I don't think that me performing female roles necessitate any queer association. What I embody is rather this traditional image of ideal male who also embraces feminine qualities." ☉

drag kings



Diane Torr in *Drag Kings & Subjects* at P.S.122, New York, 1995. Photo: Dona Ann McAdams

Performing the Masculine: Diane Torr & Peggy Shaw

by Aaron Schloff

Diane Torr is a performance artist who leads workshops that train women to act as men, at least for a few hours. When the women go out in public as men, they know their voice is a clear giveaway. Their masculinity depends on how they are seen and how their presence is felt. Torr is in Germany, on tour, and I'm in Brooklyn, so she has to describe her presence with voice alone. As we talk, the air is thick with gesture, but there are none to be seen.

In her latest performance, *Drag Kings and Subjects*, Torr plays several male characters, but the workshops are always led by one named Danny King. I have a picture of Danny at a downtown New York lunch counter. His hair is brylcreemed with a part on the right, and his mustache is slightly thicker than a pencil mustache, and forms a neat roof to his small open mouth. Light appliqué stubble dusts his cheeks. His

dark double breasted suit has shiny buttons (the biological breasts are bound), his wide tie has a diagonal plaid, his hands rest on his thighs above the knee with his fingers pointing inward toward the center of his open legs. The picture is too dark to see any signature creases or a bulge. Her head leads down and to the left, but her stare angles up and to the right. This plus the open mouth, crotchpointing fingers and absolute disinterest of the three other men in the picture, one of whom obviously picks his nose, raises the Diane's *Danny* look to the level of male porn. It's a comeon, but aggressively selfpossessed. She fucks the camerajust like a man. It's an achievement.

Torr tells me what's inside *Danny*. "He has four kids, takes care of them on Saturdays, manages the men's department of a store in Europe. Now he's on a buying trip. He goes deer hunting with the boys,

he's a member of the NRA, he lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania." He wears Church's shoes and his underwear is Y-fronts, the baseline underwear for a white American man. "Also the flap is useful for putting the penis in." The penis is detachable. She could sew it on to the briefs but she doesn't. "*Danny* is a signifier, a physicalized idea," Torr says. A stereotype. Torr herself resists typification. She's married to a man. She has a child. And she's partial to lesbians. She teaches performance and also practices shiatsu massage, she's an akidoist with a second degree black belt. "I don't like any of these labels, I just do a lot of different things." Where she grew up, in Scotland, in the 1950s, roles were more fixed. Men worked on trawlers in the North Sea, and women checked coats in cloakrooms or served school lunches.

"Generally, kids are brought up to

be as close to the stereotype as possible. People can say why are you dealing with essentialist notions of masculinity, and I say there's a lot of truth in them. They're recognizable. The mustache, the gaze, the leading from the shoulder, moving from side to side as you're walking forward, it's almost like setting up an invisible periphery or boundary about two feet around yourself if you walk down the street. And people just get out of your way. You see that in New York all the time, people are always stepping out of the way for men. It's just expected".

Peggy Shaw is a performance artist and teacher as well. I think I'd step aside for her; she, too, knows how to be a man. But she denies it. "I was driving in New York and she [drag performer Bette Bourne, of Bloodlips] was in the front, and I was screaming 'you fucking asshole' and so on, and she said 'sometimes when I'm with you, it's like being with a man' and I said 'Bette, the only way you can describe anything is "men." There are very aggressive women. It has nothing to do with being a man."

In her most recent show *Lust and Comfort*, which she performed with her lover and collaborator Lois Weaver, Shaw played a character based on Tony, James Fox's character in the 1963 film *The Servant*. Fox's character is aristocratic and delicate, like an early Stephen Tennant. Shaw has some stereotypically "aristocratic" features like a small mouth, fair skin, high cheekbones and a high forehead, but her nose is less cute and more intelligent, and her Tony had a swagger that filled the stage. There was no deference involved. The servant, played by Weaver, was there to serve, and Shaw's Tony made his needs known.

Shaw said it had more to do with class than sex. "Usually, from my background, I choose a more working class image. Studying *The Servant* I wanted to play a little bit more with prerogative, that whole Ivy League thing that disgusts me so much. That whole image to me is throwing my tie back over my shoulder," even though she wore an ascot. The rest of the costume supported the character: gray trousers, a white dress shirt, a blue double breasted blazer. Underneath, she wore a slip, and underneath that, men's y-front briefs. She said they were good for holding some prop grapes, but the multiple underwear was a signal to me that my definition of maleness was wearing thin. Shaw says she always performs as a woman. "After twenty years of lesbian theater I still don't play men. The most I tried was Stanley [Marlon Brando's character] in *Belle Reprieve* [a gender-reversed takeoff on *Streetcar Named Desire*] but still I never believed I was playing a man. I was playing a lesbian. Because

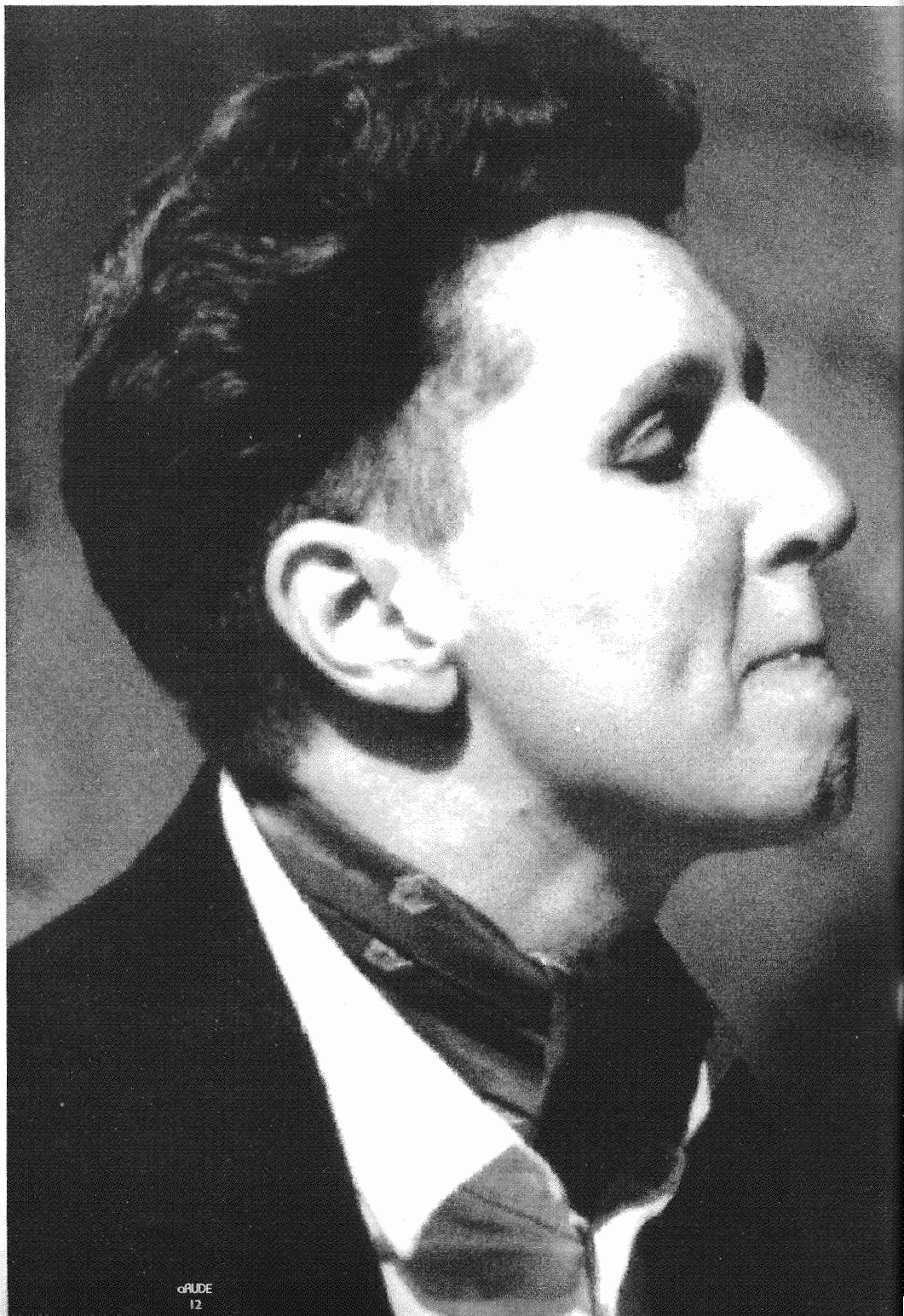
of my training as a performer, not as an actor. I never really leave myself."

Then to be like Shaw is not to be like a man, or even to be masculine. It's just about being butch. And in their own workshops, this is what she and Weaver teach, mostly to straight theater students. "We turn everything into butch and femme so they don't mean masculine and feminine. After three hours of doing this, everything has a meaning that has nothing to do with male and female."

To float in this postmodern ether of attributes separated from biological sex is Torr's goal as well. "I don't believe in those notions of masculinity and femininity, they're a complete fiction...Femininity is something women feel they have to corre-

spond with. It's a male Idea of what women should be." The male idea of what men should be can be equally oppressive to men, of course, but the way it embodies power is what Torr's workshop students try to put to work. With their blazers or sweatshirts or flannel shirts, their mustaches or goatees and stubble, and their training in gesture and movement, they go out for an evening as male characters, to play the role as fully as they can.

I spoke to two of them, Marie Dallam and Crosby, which is her full name. "To perform as that person, that man, was hard," Dallam said. I didn't want to be him. I just wanted to pass as a man. I should have kept the details of my life the same and changed my name." Since the work-



shop, she is taking up more space, just as Torr's stereotypical men do. For Crosby, it wasn't about passing. "It was about being in drag." Costume was her motivator. "I was transformed on the outside and the inside followed." Since the workshop, "I guess I'm a little more obnoxious," she said modestly. "I'm on the line as to whether it's enviable or not. In the sidewalk interaction, I can't tell if I want to be the person who doesn't get out of the way."

So if I stay on the sidewalk instead of stepping off, am I more of a man? Am I more masculine? Am I more butch? More powerful? Or am I just in the way? Someday, in New York, deference and politeness will be as universal as suffrage. Someday I will win the lottery. Someday

power will float free of sex, but these women aren't waiting. Shaw: "At a college, they were doing a Caryl Churchill play, and I was told to teach three women how to be men. I said 'I don't know how to be men.' They said 'just come and do it, we'll pay you, just come and teach...something.' So I went and for eight hours I taught them to perform their prerogative. It has nothing to do with being masculine or feminine. In order to get to the prerogative, most of them had to place a male in the chair. I do a workshop where they sit as somebody with a lot of prerogative in a chair. And that's usually a man. So they become this character. And then they sit in the chair as this person. And they're able to find their own...power through it ...it could start by imitating, that's how you learn." @

"I don't believe in those notions of masculinity and femininity, they're a complete fiction. Femininity is something women feel they have to correspond with. It's a male idea of what women should be."



Spitt Britches (Peggy Shaw & Lois Weaver); Lust & Comfort. Photo: Gordon Rainsford



joey arias

the inimitable vixen in conversation with René Penco

In 1990 Joey Arias delighted a massed crowd at Union Square with his remarkable impersonation of Billie Holiday. Today Miss Holiday's life remains a compelling testimony of artistic and human triumph in the face of racism, sexism, abuse, and persecution. Billie Holiday's powerful legacy to the development of Jazz/Blues earned her a permanent place in the pantheon of 20th century musical icons. Although Joey Arias has been performing since 1987, that event shot him into the orbit of downtown artist extraordinaire. A few evenings before my interview with him, I'd seen Joey perform at Bar d'O where he rules as Diva-in-Residence on Sunday

and Tuesday nights and holds court with his spirited brand of Weimar Style cabaret.

At 3.40p.m., a taxi bearing Joey rolled up. "Jump in," he said. "Sorry I'm late but I had to collect some documents on my way to meet you." It was 3.50p.m. by the time we finally sat around an outdoor table at Spring Street Natural, under the shade of a large umbrella. He ordered a rich rhubarb pie with coffee; I fought the muggy August-day dehydration with a salad and bottled water.

René Penco: Joey, I'd first like to thank you for taking time off your hectic schedule to meet with me.

Joey Arias: My Pleasure.

So can we jump in?

Yes, let's take the plunge.

You like sink or swim situations?

Either, because I know that even if I sink I'll come back up for air.

A survivor, eh?

That's right.

O.K., Joey, can you speak briefly about your background and recall your earliest cultural influences, by that I mean the music, T.V. shows, movies which were your strongest points of reference.

I remember my parents took me to see *Cleopatra* with Liz Taylor. I was so blown away by the ancient culture, costumes, makeup and the attitudes that when I returned home, I reproduced my own version of *Cleopatra*. I got dressed and made up and had the

neighborhood kids be the servants and slaves.

What neighborhood was that?

This was in California. I was around 7 or 8.

So from as early as 7 or 8 you were already recreating your own version of images you'd seen and liked?

Yes.

What other characters were you strongly attracted to?

The Addams Family, The Munsters, Star Trek, cartoons, Sci-Fi and, oh yeah, Horror. That was my thing also. I was President of a Monster Movie Club. We found this abandoned old house with a cellar and we'd go to the cellar after school. I went to catholic school so the nuns and priests were terrified. They'd be teaching about Christ and here I was teaching how to cut up dead bodies, keep rats, suck blood from your victim, you know. But then at the same time, I wanted to be a nun. I'd seen that nun story with Audrey Hepburn. So I think I liked the ceremony, the dressing, the pomp and circumstance.

Reminds me of that Ken Russel film...

The Devils.

Right. So fantasy and its interpretation have always interested you, which brings me to the fact that you've succeeded today as a performance artist whose strong suit is female impersonation. Historically, this has been more socially acceptable and artistically successful in the male-to-female mode. In ancient Greece, in the performance of Adamma or Kabuki theater, males have played female roles. More recently, international designers have used male drag artists in their runway shows. In the film *Victor Victoria*, Julie Andrews plays a woman playing a man playing a woman. Other than Dietrich and Josephine Baker who added to their myths by boldly wearing male attire, female-to-male impersonation has found little or no commercial success. What, in your opinion, constitutes this phenomenon?

I could say "It's a Man's World..."

Male monopoly?

Yes, male monopoly. There's always a comic edge to men doing women whereas women doing men tend to be serious and not fun. I've spoken to lesbian women about this, not truck drivers but runway types and they say "We're serious." So that's it, I guess.

So You're saying it's a social tradition that must have an element of comedy to it. Is it comedy or parody?

It could be both, really, parody and comedy. And now in the 90's, it's not even about impersonation anymore. It's about who you are, and creating a whole new identity. I'm not impersonating Billie Holiday; I'm channeling a feeling of Billie Holiday. I could have as many visuals as I like, but it's what's coming out of my soul that is the most important part.

A reference to your show, *Strange Fruit*, which relies exclusively on materials belonging to Miss Holiday and which you deliver in a voice remarkably like her's. This is a unique gift and has become a trademark alter ego. What drew you to an artist whose contribution to the world is eternally monumental?

It was the feeling that Billie had. I remember as a kid listening to jazz music and of course, there were others like Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald who were great singers, but there was something about Billie's voice. It was, like someone said about my voice: breathy, elegant. Billie was painting words with every gasp of air that came out of her esophagus.

That expression "gasp of air," as if life itself was a

difficult process for her.

Definitely, it was and in fact that's how I think my life parallels Billie's: a woman, outspoken, African-American, in a time of open racism...

That's right. In spite of her enormous success, she couldn't enter certain Department Stores; couldn't buy property in certain neighborhoods, etc. can you relate personal experiences of discrimination similar in form, if not content, to Miss Holiday's?

Sure. As a gay male in the 90's trying to make it in the music industry dominated by a heterosexual, Boys' Club. We've got RuPaul who finally broke through due to the determination of a lot of people involved with her. I also believe that it's easier now for African-American drag artists to be accepted because people say "Oh well, it's the result of African-American Liberation."

That's interesting, is it some subtle form of affirmative action?

Yeah. I think that in the business, they're sitting in their corporate offices saying, "O.K., we've allowed so many Whites. And after Boy George, who's the next one? Well, RuPaul is the next freak they got.

Freak? Is Ru a freak?

No, I mean, that's what they're saying. Not me. We're talking about the mentality of the Boys' Club who's making the decisions.

And holding the purse strings?

Yes. I've sat in at some meetings and heard these guys say they're filling a quota. There's a million talented artists out there. Who gets to be a success? People have heard my voice and say "My God, this is incredible. It should do really well." But no one will touch me because I'm a gay male. I've got tossed, thrown at, beaten up. I've been called names. I've been told to go through the kitchen and not mingle with the guests at parties. "Oh joey, we don't need you out there right now. Remain in the kitchen until it's time for us to get you. Then be fabulous. And then after you're done, don't be out there so much because it's their party and you need not be there." So I've felt all those feelings.

I've also had a lot of friends die of AIDS. When I see people my age, or in their 20's and younger, dying like flies, and not of old age, that takes its toll on you. **So at a relatively young age you've already experienced much loss.**

Yes, and it's affected my perspective on life. This voice that's coming through, for example. It's not a voice of a twenty years old, it's the voice of someone who has experienced a lot.

Joey, of the great songs in Miss Holiday's repertoire, why *Strange Fruit* as the name of the show?

Actually that was picked by the bass player of my back-up band called Reefer Madness. One of them said to me "you've got to call it *Strange Fruit* because you're a strange fruit. You're exotic, you're delicious and you're definitely strange." I've always loved that song so when they gave me the opportunity to do the show, I immediately decided to call it *Strange Fruit*.

So it was chosen rather to describe how society perceives Joey and not in the way Miss Holiday used it nor the way she was perceived. Right?

Exactly. She used it to speak about African-American men being lynched and hung on trees by White people, but today, in the 90's, it can refer to gay people being hung by a jury, whoever that jury might be. Or people contaminated with AIDS, who then become strange fruits. One doesn't have to be literally hung anymore. The song has transcended its original meaning for me.

I'm using it as a metaphor for our time just as she did. Of course it applied to her own.

The night I saw you perform, the audience was predominantly White. You'd think that because of its continued relevance and the fact that Miss Holiday was an African-American, there'd be a wider ethnic cross section. Any ideas why that isn't the case?

I have to differ there. There's a really mixed group of people in there: young, old, straight, gay, white and African-American. Bar d'O is in the village. I'd probably get a larger African-American audience in Harlem, perhaps. And I think that what I'm doing might scare a lot of African-Americans.

How so?

Because they'll think it's twisted: a white-gay male doing Billie Holiday. Again, it's not an impersonation. It's channeling a feeling. I keep insisting on that. I sing the songs my way, and it happens to have a lot of the same feeling in there. But it's my thing, you know.

That night, I could almost believe I was listening to Miss Holiday at one point. However, you hitched up your skirt and mooned the audience. You also made liberal use of the words 'Fuck' and 'Dick' in your banter. I admit to some confusion, what was that?

It was Joey coming through. Joey having a good time, but then again, the places where Billie hung out were speakeasies. People would sit there drinking and doing drugs. They were good time bars. That's how people communicated and that's what I'm doing. We're not in a library or church, so every so often you throw in the word 'fuck' or something funny to give people a good laugh, to break up the monotony of their day at the office. Of course, if I'm at a business meeting with them, I'm not going to say "Motherfucker this or that" but when they come into my turf, I'm going to cut it up.

Do you believe Miss Holiday was about a "good time" girl?

Definitely, there is this fallacy that she was just down and out. She was so talented but people only point out the tragedies in her life. We've all had personal tragedies. There is a biography which will soon be out that reveals that she was really a fun person. Sure she had problems, with men, drugs, and drinking but so were most of the other artists of that time. But because she was a woman, and in the public eye, that was a no-no back then. She was so outspoken and out there, the press magnified that so she wouldn't get ahead anymore. They finally put a cap on her growth.

A cap on her growth, her career, and ultimately, her life.

Yes. She was strangled in every direction she turned, even though she'd played Carnegie hall. After that, her drinking became heavier. I myself had to stop drinking 2 months ago. In the last couple of years, I found myself drinking 4, 5 bottles of wine a night, followed by Vodka, then coke.

So you no longer drink?

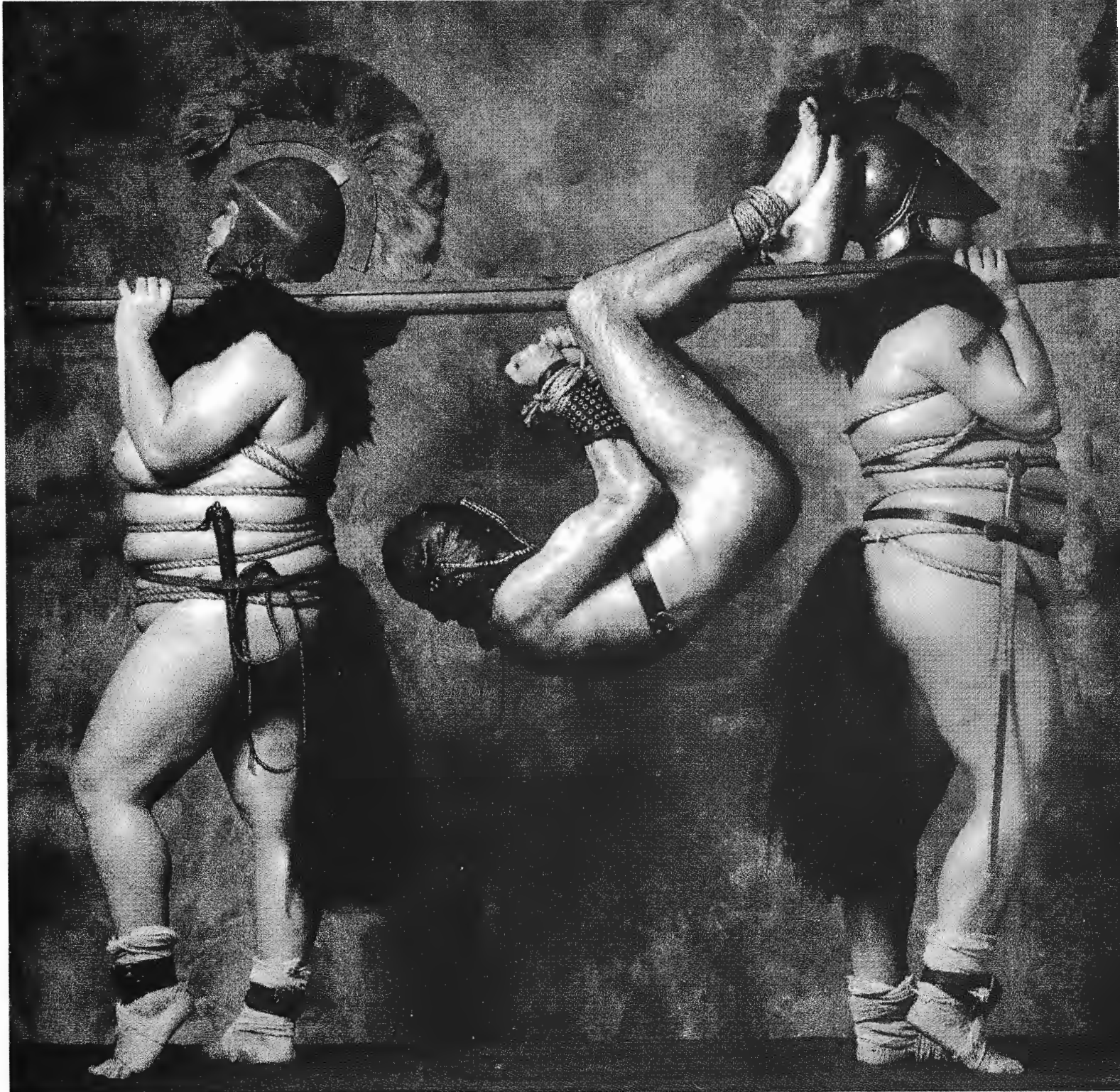
Not right now. I wouldn't say I've quit but I don't need a drink to achieve that feeling, otherwise I'll be gone in a couple of years.

Is there any lesson as a result of all these?

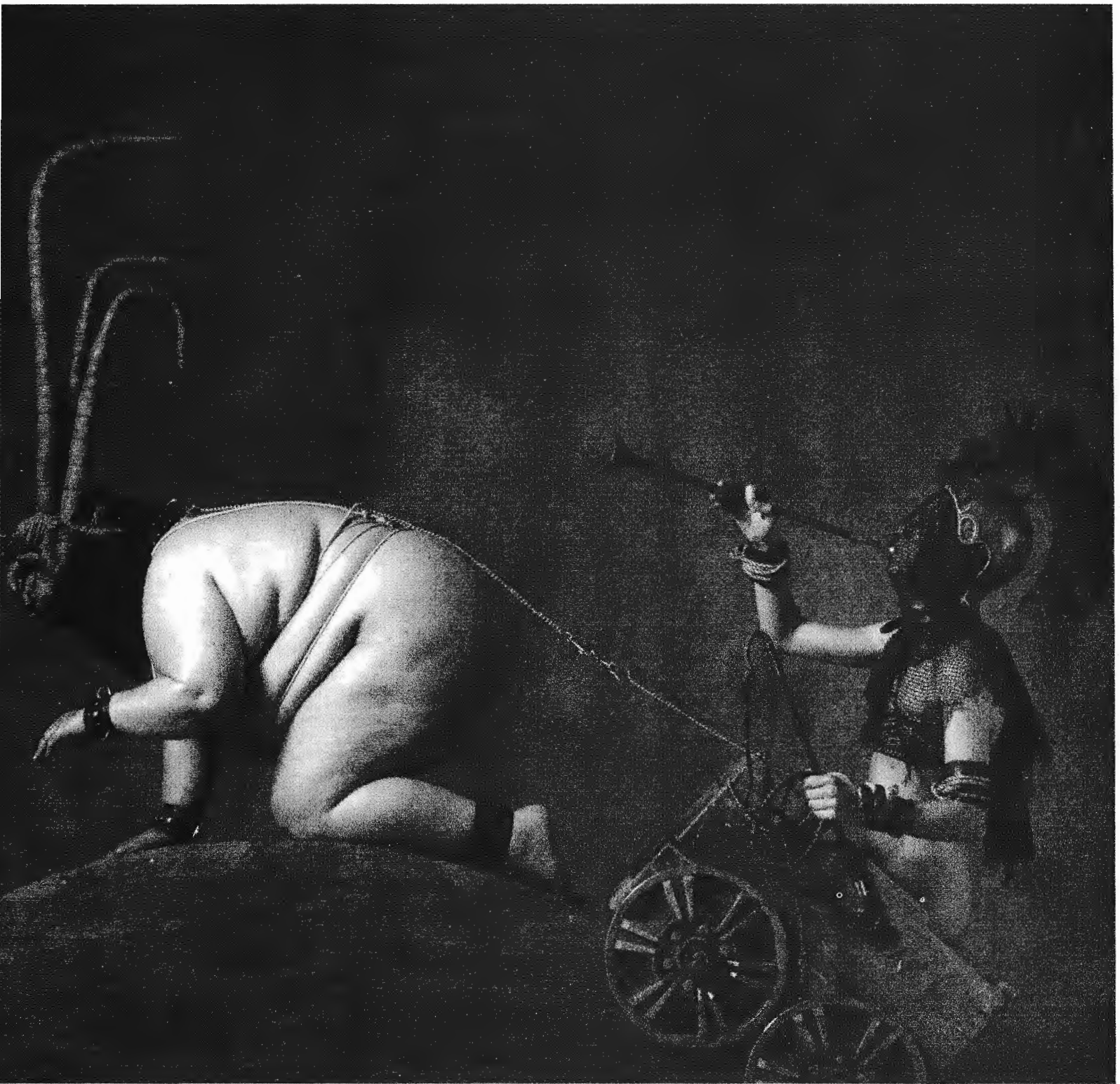
You've got to take control of your life and guide your own way. I don't want to go so fast now. I see a lot of young kids come to the show. They love the sense of humor, the unnatural naturalness, the lyrics. They want to be taught. I've got to be careful, like a teacher in a way. At the same time, I just want to do my thing. I'm about dealing with whatever comes at me.

(continued on page 28)

FANTASY & SIMULACRUM



Silver Gelatin Print, courtesy Wessel O'Connor Gallery



PHOTOGRAPHS BY

ERWIN OLAF



Photo: Ike Ude

Deborah Drier

on men being beautiful

The notion of male beauty, of men as beautiful, is suspect in this Eurocentric culture. "X" had hair like coarse gold rope, high cheekbones, a pink, wet mouth, and light blue eyes. He was beautiful. You couldn't look at him long enough, though I tried, through touch, to do so. "Y"'s chest was hard and sculpted as a kouros. I knew I wouldn't have him for long, but I carry the memory of his triangulated flesh in my fingertips.

When I described "X" as beautiful to a famous shrink he told me I was "perverse." (It was not meant as a compliment.) Men were handsome, women beautiful. It was verboten to muddle the categories, not right (even immoral) to imply that gender boundaries might be made for crossing. It was forbidden to look at, think of, or enjoy men in that way.

You don't have to want to fuck a man to find him beautiful, though when you want to, he will often become so. Women (straight and lesbian) are allowed to look at and appreciate other women. But there seems too much at stake in our culture to comfortably permit most straight guys to appreciate a man in a physical way, in other words, a man as an object of desire. We "het" (or bi) girls and gay boys enjoy the pleasure and feel that tightening between breast bone and groin, that contraction of desire that could be the death of you (and you sort of hope so).

It is about desire after all, and about power: who should be allowed to desire whom. Which is why, perhaps, Robert Dornan, the Californian Republican described Marlon Riggs's film *Tongues Untied* on the House floor, as a "pornographic, profanity-filled, pro-homosexual documentary . . ." in three words, "absolute utter garbage." That's not how I saw the film. For me, Riggs's film is a luxurious pleasure; the camera

itself seems to caress the flesh on the screen. It's not simply an occasion for voyeurism, but it certainly may be seen as a celebration of male beauty (among other things).

Men should be allowed to take pleasure in their beauty, and need not project it onto the female. Beauty, like knowledge, is part of eros, a term equated with love.

If beauty is seen as extreme, and the careful boundary that separates the male from the female is threatened, then we're really talking danger, in short really posing a threat. I have to admit to initially being disconcerted whenever confronted with a person of an indeterminate gender. Transvestism is one thing; it may seem almost domesticated these days. But if the difference is carried in the body, not the clothes, and that body is not immediately legible as male or female, well, watch that anger rise, even among gays and lesbians.

The beautiful, according to Webster's dictionary, "stirs emotion through the senses." The handsome, on the other hand, is about what is deemed "appropriate and proper." Handsomeness is seen as relating to "proportion, symmetry, elegance"—think of da Vinci's ideal man, "the measure of all things". Yet beauty is perceived as unstable—one can lose it, whereas the handsome remains fixed, in control, undisturbed.

To return to my original contention: men, like women, can be beautiful. This beauty, however, is not about shiny hair or perfect pecs. It is not about the dewy freshness of untouched youth. The present crisis of masculinity is more a crisis of belief. It is no longer clear what it means to be a "real" man. The blurring of the lines between the genders has caused much reaction and resentment. But, for some of us, it may equally be a cause for celebration. Pleasure is not only about gratification, it may also be about rights, about the freedom to be. ©

thierry mugler

conversation with
Marcus Leatherdale

Marcus Leatherdale: Considering the extraordinary book you put out a few years ago on fashion, lots of people weren't aware of the fact that you actually took your own photographs:

Thierry Mugler: It was almost ten years ago, this book. It is an extraordinary group of photographs in terms of its monumentality, overwhelming, and exotic locations you shot them at. I think all these efforts set you apart from many other fashion photographers.

I always try to look for the most inspiring locations. Actually this book wouldn't be possible now because it's too expensive, to go to China, or Africa.

How did the book come about?

I started doing my own art in collaboration with Helmut Newton. I'd always admire Newton. He was very good for my style. We share the same style: very sexy, tough women. Before I started my company, I'd always hoped that one day I will have the budget to do art with Newton. We did a few times. We had lots of fight. He'd always said to me, "Why don't you do it yourself? You know so much and you know how you want things to be." I told him: "Fine, next year you'll lose a client (me), I am doing it myself." So I started like that. My first shoot was in Japan. The first campaign was half in Japan and half in the Moroccan sahara.

Have you been to Morocco before then, or was that your introduction to Morocco?

Oh, I have been all over Africa, except South Africa. I still have to discover that. I'm happy that there are still places I haven't been. I have done special collections, special clothes; I need locations to go with it. And the studio doesn't inspire me at all. I need real environments, vibrations, sounds, adventure.

What about the iceberg picture you did?

That was the most exercise I've ever done.

Where was that like?

These icebergs were floating in the north sea. And we were very close to the North pole. I never could've imagined that icebergs are so huge; enormous, miles and miles. They flow and explode, going upside down, making big waves. It wasn't possible at all to approach this monstrous ice. The most dangerous thing was that two of my models were on a small iceberg moving closer to the bigger ones. Furthermore when these icebergs move, they are capable of cutting someone into two. It was very dangerous, but my models did it very quickly.

Then there is this other problematic photograph in which you used Vladimir and, who is the other model with him in the picture?

She is a young model that I discovered. Her name is Charke. She is from New Zealand. She's absolutely beautiful. We assembled the set in a parking lot. Everything was fake. I just used one lava wall from the parking lot, in addition we added some plants, plastics and lights.

Was the combination of Vladimir and the blonde a pure aesthetic decision or what?

It's the story of the last show I did. I like contrast, extreme contrast; or wild, natural energy in contrast with high sophistication. **So it never occurred to you that people associate such pairing with racial implications?**

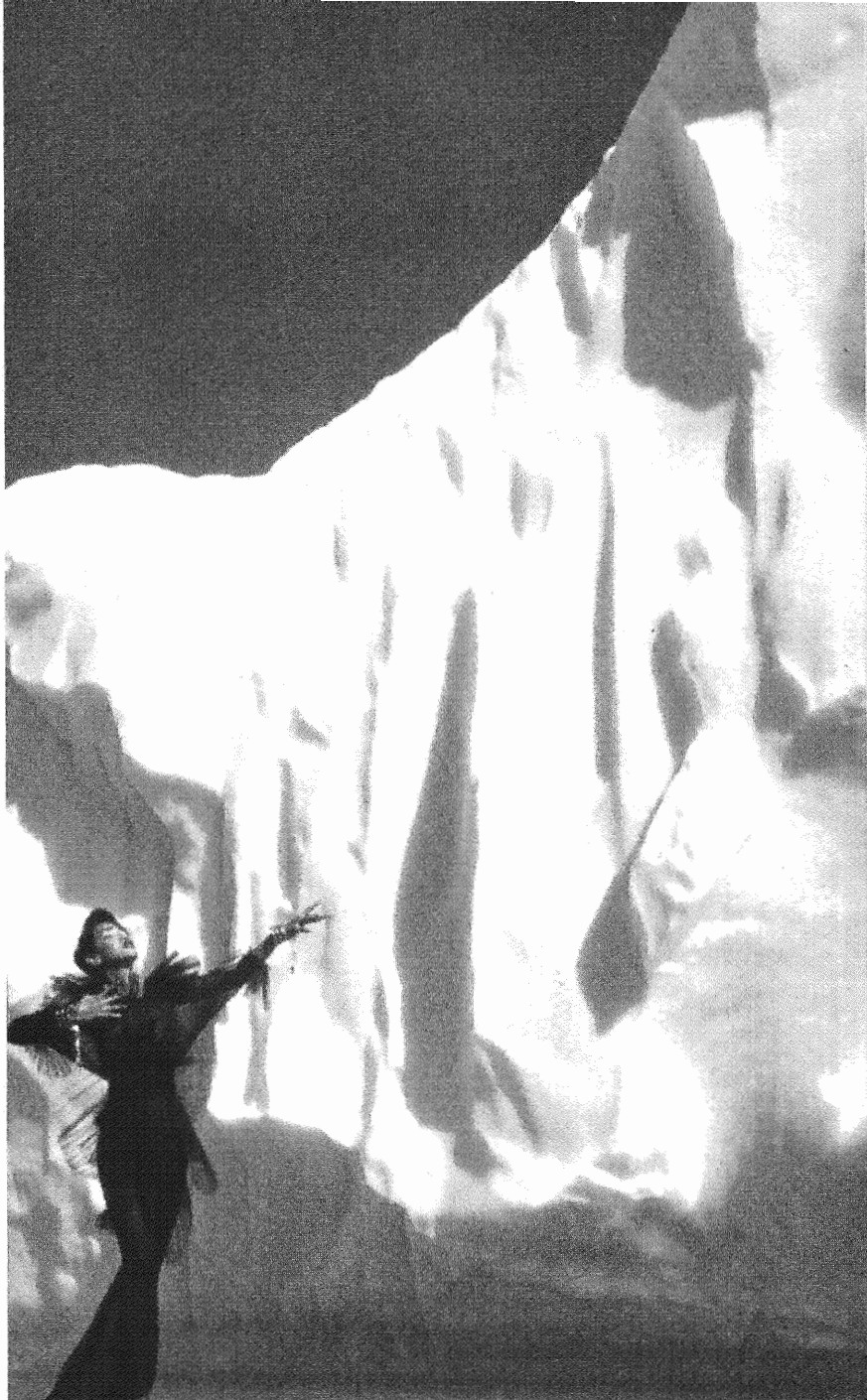


Photo: Thierry Mugler

I just love all kinds of beauty, all kinds of races, and the contrast in between. I like the energy between races. The energy that different, extreme kinds of beauty can create, and the sexual attraction of different extreme types.

I am sure black and white always work for that aesthetics. Classics and rock music work too.

Lots of your location shots came from your personal travels.

I document every place in the world. The first time I went to Russia it was absolutely amazing. There were all kinds of statues on the subway gates

Where else have you not been yet that you would like to go?

It'll have to be south of East Africa. It's close to South Africa. I was going to shoot a commercial there, but the war taking place there prevented us from going. Instead we went back to the Sahara.

Do you ever come across anyone wearing your clothes outside of Europe?

Beside Iman in the middle of the Sahara desert?

I mean, outside of the familiar context of London, Paris, or New York.

Yes, one can see my clothes worn in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Peking and of course, Japan.

(continued on page 77)



Photo: Nancy Barton

Around "Dracula" the fastest puns in the West have drawn in the blanks: Batula, Blacula, Spermula, Suckula, and, twice in the seventies, the era of the other's bad taste, Dragula. Once it starts putting itself on, the drag of mourning is not transmittable: but its unconscious makeup will transmit until the look it has is out and over. At the crowded intersection where drive power exceeds most transferential models – the crossing that's jamming with perversion, psychosis, and the psychology of the group or group-of-one – transvestism (or "TV") nevertheless puts on the one and only mourning show available within a network of melancholic or haunted delegations.

To fine-tune the screen of small differences in mourning style one could review the cases of H.G. Wells, Rainer Maria Rilke, or Andy Warhol, in which the little boys were caught, under their mother's funereal direction, wearing the clothes and look of a dead sister. Mother, who couldn't

let go of her missing child outside the group context or contest of mourning drag, thus granted the sons her captive audience.

The Stoker crypt has not yielded a full body shot of loss, the kind that can be rebuilt, let go and put to rest. The internal or eternal coordinates of this crypt's location break down into and between the lines of a "TV" transmission. It was after gagging on "dressed crab" that Stoker dreamt up Dracula. The crab that always moves backwards was the mother's loss, which had gained on him.

Less a period than a coma, Stoker's childhood wasn't early or late, but extended for a seven-year stretch, the time it took before he could "stand upright." While he was lying there, there was a seven-year hitch, the catch in their throat. Stoker's mother supplied the audio portion, the mother tongue, the clitoral reading, that was implanted inside her son, savior, safe. In the captivity scene she told not only the usual

ghost stories but also "I was there" histories of cholera outbreaks that continued to plague them with a turnover too fast on the intake for those standing by to wait and be sure before burying the bodies dead or alive. Stoker spent the better half of his life managing PR for actor Henry Irving. Their bonding at first meeting climaxed in Irving's reading out loud the ballad "Eugene Aram" (some Cain-and-Abel, murdered-but-undead-sibling special). It sent Stoker into "hysterics" – he hit the floor running with the recollection or identification that he had not been in this same position of motor uncoordination since age seven.

Stoker assumed the vertical controls only after the youngest sibling and seventh child George was born (who, like all the Stoker sons but one, became a physician). Even in the fine-tuned, upstanding mode Stoker always had to be patient to the siblings playing doctor. When Irving for his part needed to know how to carry a corpse across stage, Stoker called in brother George, who had served in the Russo-Turkish War, to give the demo – which George agreed to, only if, as though by default, brother Bram would fill in for the missing corpse.

But by 1910, near the closing time of his collected work, Stoker published his casebook Famous Impostors, a series of studies that celebrated its season finale with a rerun of rumorological accounts of Princess Elizabeth's sudden death in Bisley: the blank was secretly filled in, rapid-turnover style, with a lookalike boy ("The Bisley Boy," which is the legend's name or nickname) who was then raised incognito to give continuity shots to the virgin queen-ship. "For convenience we shall speak of the substitute of the Princess as though he were the Princess herself whom he appeared to be, and for whom he was accepted thenceforth."

Complete cryptological treatment requires that full-corpus immersion that doesn't uphold boundaries between work and life. Freud's diagnosis of where the wound goes in any vehicle for wish fulfillment doubles as another way of locating this fall of the wall: all literature that has any kind of story to tell is, bottomline, trivial. On the low row, literature shows its lifelines of defense with blinding, blinding openness. That's why the transition to technologization is another easy one to make through open borders. And it works both ways. The crypt in Tod Browning's Dracula is hard to make out (in part because of the theatricalization and Oedipalization that have control-released the projection from book to screen): you have to make the transition to Stoker's novel – and to his so-called life. The crypt effects that then float to the surface are the same ones Bela Lugosi rides out. But it's yet another film that brings the disturbance full circuit; the undead projection or ghost will in time, in turn give way to a displacement of the mourning that could never be conducted in its proper place. So

when Ed Wood, Jr. claimed that his post-productions filmed real life he was right on the shifting line of that continental divide between life and work that's Hollywood. Even the most campy construction, as though its mobilization of immunity against the outside chance of invasion from any dimension other than the two-fold or two-faced kind amounted to an ominous denial, must soak up the invisible blood of a crypt transmission, the floating or flying crypt, sighted somewhere over the corpses of Stoker, Lugosi, and Wood. What makes the crowd of Oedipal plots and equally prefab unburial plots in Plan Nine from Outer Space is the accident of Lugosi's death early on in the filming. But Wood wouldn't let go: he worked the leftover recognition value of Lugosi the vampire through to a posthumous end. In the movie he thus completed with Lugosi as lead in spite of the star's death, unused trial or stray footage of Lugosi (which has the posthumous status of every home movie) gets spliced into the makeshift plot and filled out with the continuity shooting of a body or forehead double (who passes for Lugosi by keeping cape raised up to the lookalike eyes and forehead). When Lugosi dies, then, his or the protagonist's mourning sickness gets plugged into the film posthumously by over-voicing footage of Lugosi in the front yard of his bungalow. Wood is inspired to give voiceover to images of the crypt. When the beam from outer space is lowered on the dead melancholic he is already – through the accident of Lugosi's own death – part of a series of resurrections and not the model source of (nor even the diversion from) the posthumous terms of haunting which his mausoleum and recognition value have set up. The outer-space government later singles out his second resurrection as target for demonstration to the earthlings of another power – that of beam-induced instant decomposition. This time around, as one of the undead, the Lugosi figure is the first to go, but only as a diversion from Lugosi's multiple deaths. Actual Lugosi footage gets folded in around the subplotting with the couple living next door to the cemetery (the husband is the airline pilot who first saw the news flash across the sky of alien invasion), a plot pulled up short before the final encounter with recycled melancholia at the moment scheduled for the Lugosi figure's disintegration demo. What we see decomposed and superimposed is what Lugosi got according to the self-imposed conditions of his own burial: what's left is a skeleton in a cape.

The reception that came together – in short circuit, skirt, and sweater – in Ed Wood, Jr.'s career was still staggered, staggering across long distance in the case of Lugosi which it took Wood to open and shut. Wood entered the Stoker legacy into the drag race of mourning over Bela Lugosi's dead body, and thus lined it up with the machine delegations which were getting the work done in the cases of Wells, Rilke,

and Warhol. Lugosi was on a role: even when he was the first to be made the offer no one could refuse (re-fuse), he turned down the Frankenstein parts on grounds of incompatibility with his Count persona. But he was stoked – just one upbeat away from lying down with the Dracula legacy in the crypt mode of motor uncoordination. During the making of Dracula, Lugosi began to double over with terrible leg pains which he could only stand by shooting up with morphine. It was a double addiction that followed the role of a lifetime: the identification with Dracula's look and the drug habit. In the end his final request, that he be buried in his Dracula drag, was, at last, fulfilled.

Towards the living end of Lugosi, when drugs and the recycling of the role had him at the disposal of his identifications, he had a couple (and couplification) of breaks or near misses. His fifth and last wife Holly, who, having revved up for decades within the fan ranks before up and joining Lugosi for his remaining two years of drug freedom, had the bedside track on his unblurred identifications: "He was always acting" she told the National Enquirer after his death. In intraview she also recognized his fans who were all along acting out in front of the crypt or screen (or scream) which they sealed, consumer-style, with their approval: "all boys – no girls. They wear makeup and hang around funeral parlors." And there was Ed Wood, Jr.'s attachment to Lugosi, the other break that articulated what Holly Wood finally had to offer: a makeshift compromise formation between perversion and reproduction in the name of gadget love or "TV."

We'd be skipping a step if we passed on any mention of Wood's own case of transvestism. It was the occasion for Wood's first movie break, Glen or Glenda, in which Lugosi played the sex-change doctor and omniscient voice over. In Glen or Glenda Lugosi opens and shuts the cases of "TV" in person and, then, still as host or ghost, haunts the often encrypted, recycled footage with Genesis-style voice over "bringing to light" "many startling things." Street scene footage: "people going somewhere with their own personalities." Then the turntable between audio and video gets its volume of life in death turned up full blast: a new day is begun; a new life is begun; a life is ended. We're at the scene of a suicide case that's under investigation. The suicide note left behind by the "TV" (played by Wood) leaves funeral directions: "I was put in jail for wearing women's clothing. Let me wear these things in death if I can't in life." The narrative frame or contract between the inspector in charge of the case and the specialist he consults must rise above the contradiction between the whole story, which lies in the "depths of a man's mind," and the shock people still thrill to when they come across headlines of sex change or cross dressing. This shock, which is also always the inoculative shot that gets

us in the ready position for the changes that are already upon us, recalls our earlier recoil, in the name of God, from the prospects for artificial flight or, earlier on, from the outside chance or change represented by car travel (the blank stares of resistance are filled in with readymade footage of planes dropping bombs and cars jamming on the LA freeways). "Yet, to this day, the world is shocked by sex change."

In Killer in Drag, Wood's contribution to an ADULTS ONLY series (Original Imperial Books), the "TV" (also named Glen/Glenda) is not exclusively straight up with a twist (or, for that matter, otherwise a good citizen), but is shown in all kinds of ready positioning: deciding now for, now against the transsexual operation, sleeping with men or women but always as a man in perfect drag, murdering for pay and then, one time only, one last time, to get funding for her way out of the syndicate or, by any other name, the underworld. But when Glenda leaves her purse behind at the scene of a murder she didn't commit, she's framable and her drag cover is blown in public: "Then it hit her. Hit her as plainly as if the picture were being projected on the windshield in front of her; like on the screen at a drive-in movie theatre." In the drag of another woman, Glen/Glenda does finally escape to California. But the underworld aims its assembly line of double agents at the Wood figure's outside chance in Hollywood; Glen/Glenda's "TV" replacement is sent to the Coast to make the hit.


One of Wood's parting shots was the sexploitation film Necromania that brought to consciousness Hollywood's standard diversion and deviation from the crypt of narcissistic disturbance to and through the couples therapy that treats sexual problems between partners and leaves them there in the afterglow of cure-all: the consummation of couplification that the haunting had only interrupted, like some easy-to-bust symptom of sex repression, always comes at the end of Hollywood versions of Dracula or Frankenstein. In Necromania the couple that is shown to be sexually dysfunctional is separated for the duration of the wife's lesbian diversions and the husband's encounter with an "other woman." But the Oedipal plot gives way to the extravaganza climax: the husband is healed by the Madame of the clinic who, without leaving her coffin, shuts it tight on top of the two of them going at it. The crypt-enforced position of downright lying is thus married to the upright takeoff and flight of the man's reset erections, set via the crypt-transmitter of techno-haunting back on the straight and narrow path. This was a different way: it allowed Wood, Jr. (Young Stoker) to live or get around in (rather than work through, survive, or transmit) the crypt of carried-over losses. Rather than drag around the missing corpus at the burdensome remove of projective displacement, Wood over-and-outed the ghostly legacy via the live or life transmission of "TV." @



simply

RU / PAUL

conversation with Iké Udé

 To see RuPaul is to encounter a molded masculine tower whose smooth svelte and feminine excess radiates genuine and unpretentious warmth and conviction. A paradox, but the truth. She stands at 6 ft. 5 in. plus—except this time she was sitting, signing her recently published autobiography: *Let It All Hangout* (Hyperion Press; 1995). Unfatigued, her eyes were perfect and open, supported by a smart nose, full lips, even matte complexion and a lovely smile that reveals perfect teeth. Crowning and framing her head and face was an exotic blond wig, partially tressed.

I certainly must commend Ru's tact with makeup. Her makeup concealed and revealed with sheer economy, all that she wanted. Seated, her long limbs found balance on a pair of extra high-heel shoes. In short Ru's overall appearance was a complete harmony in femme drag.

Ru clearly has divested herself of the vulgar cult of vanity plaguing the drag world. Her bearing is a work of wrought beauty, a fusion of exquisite interventions, that succeeds in disrupting "gender apartheid". By collapsing the categories of "he or she" Ru/she or Paul/he employs both signs of gender to serve his/her needs as he/she sees fit.

"Hello!" Ru would purr at the steady procession of her fans eagerly awaiting their turn for an autographed copy of Ru's *Let It All Hang Out*.

I had seen Ru performing at the Pyramid, Wigstock and other venues in the past. But never have I seen her performing at a bookstore. So I knew this special performance at Barnes and Nobles with its quaintly posh ambiance will be perfectly different. There was no microphone, stage platform, special lighting effects, and no spectacle or chaos.

It was all business. RuPaul's "stage" was replete with stacks of *Let It All Hang Out* waiting to be picked up and signed. "Ain't no (mountain?) high enough." RuPaul the singer/actor/actress/writer/model's performance at Barnes and Nobles consisted mostly of varying degrees of purring at her fans "Hi hon," "Hello babe," "Hi gorgeous," or "You really look great," etc. It was a successful performance. Everybody (men, women, "women," "men," etc) who stood, waited, and snaked through the line, to get to RuPaul, were rewarded with a signed copy of the diva's autobiography.

What a work. One can say RuPaul is a venture capitalist par excellence, and he/she is her/his major asset. Just remember, Ru cautions, "go ahead and be the things you need to be, be whoever you want to be, just as long as you are not hurting anybody." But which RuPaul am I talking about? Ru the "woman" or Paul the "man?" The towering femme fatale or the coy dramatist? The writer or model? The actor or actress?

Whatever, RuPaul has shown a rare union of work ethic, in its discipline, variety, glamour, and reward of fame and fortune. He has, with astute artistry collapsed that socialized "Gender Apartheid," that most of us (especially men), have to abide by. Is RuPaul an outrageous drag queen? Ah!

Stripped by RuPaul, the construct of gender reveals itself to be thread-bare, anachronistic, dusty, unbalanced, and in constant flux and useless. "You Better Work" RuPaul!

Iké Udé: What is your understanding of the term Gender?

RuPaul: I don't know if I have an understanding of it. I don't really think about it that much. I think that women can have children. Men have the sperm it takes to fertilize the egg. I think there are other things in there that are probably important. But I throw the whole gender issue out the window. Basically, I think of everybody as a unique organism.

In other words, the individual matters more than the sex?

Yes. I think so. I really do. I don't like to define myself by gender. I like to think of myself as Ru.

When you are not in drag as a performer, do you find any use for men's clothes/drag?

Sure, I utilize all drags. I make clothes work for me, because people put so much importance on outside appearance, even though the truth of what matters is inside. But since people are going to put so much importance on visual appearance, I'm going to make it work for me. For instance, when I do my banking during the day, I wear khakis and denim shirt, or something conservative looking. And when I need to meet people for business, I wear suit and tie. When I go on stage to perform for an audience, I wear my glamour drag. I make the clothes work for me.

Does your sense of self differ greatly when impersonating women?

I feel like I'm the same person. I think it's in different degrees. Obviously when I'm doing banking, I'm not shouting "Everybody Say Love."

Or everybody say money.

(Laughs) Right. Every human being alive has so many facets to their personality. It's the yin and yang. There's all these other things mixed in there. I think different clothes and different outfits you wear can sort of regulate the energy that exudes from you.

When you are performing the feminine, do you feel less manly?

No. Quite the contrary. As a matter of fact I feel more masculine in drag than I do in a pair of chinos.

Do you mean it?

Yes. I think because there is so much power I have when I'm in drag. I can really regulate situations. People give me so much energy. And I feel like a conductor of that energy. It's very powerful.

You are also an actor/actress. What films do you have coming out or up?

Recently I had a TV movie on USA network called a Mother's Prayer. It premiered on August 2nd. I'm out of drag in this movie. It stars Linda Hamilton. It's about this woman who has AIDS. She also has a son and wants her son adopted before she gets really sick. But the only catch is that she wants to choose the family he goes to. So I play her friend who helps her get through the whole thing and gets her the information that she needs.

Of all the films you've been in, which one do you like the most, and why?

Well I'll have to say. *To Wong Fu*, it was really fun because I had a spectacular EN-TRANCE into the film. I get lowered from a swing in gorgeous gown to a thunderous applause from the audience. It's really an EN-TRANCE that will rival any Lana Turner entrance into a movie. **That's wicked. Funny, I mean. What is your new album called?**

My new single came out in July, and was the first single from the Wigstock movie soundtrack. It's called "Free To Be."

Did you write the song?

Yes I wrote it. The song really say all the things I want to say to people—which is, go ahead and be the things you need to be, be whoever you want to be—just as long as you are not hurting anybody.

Just do your thing.

That's right. Actually we are shooting a video for it next week.

So you are a songwriter as well?

Yes. I write all of my songs, except obviously the duet with Elton John. I write all of my songs.

I was about to ask you if you have any duets in your forthcoming album.

Actually we are talking to a few people. There is this one song I want to duet. It hasn't come through yet. But I think there will be a duet. I can't say with who yet.

If Sylvester was around, will you like to duet with him?

I love Sylvester. In fact, she was the first drag queen I ever heard of. My sisters had sort of introduced me to him (not personally), but they told me about him it was I think in 1974. It would be such an honor. I love him.

I do too. What led you to write your autobiography at this point in your life?

I wanted to clear up the misconceptions that I... I wanted to have a forum to help a lot of kids who write to me, who feel disenfranchised from the rest of society. I wanted to show them my struggle and how you can turn adversity into opportunity. I wanted to basically let it all hang out. I wanted people to see the soul and mind of the man behind the paint and powder.

What do you think of the late but grand Dorian Corey?

I love Dorian Corey. I'll love to portray her in a movie. In fact that's something I'll love to do. I thought she was really wonderful and shrouded in mystery.

How are you coping with your enormous success so far?

It's been fun. It's been a lot of work. I really have been working towards this my whole life. In the book you'll see it. It's something I've always wanted to do. I love it. In fact it's really the same thing I'd always done, but now it's on a more bigger level.



Photo: Ike Ude

Ru working Barnes & Nobles

Is fame all you had expected it to be?

Yes it is. I've always followed pop culture and some of the first books I read were biographies of stars. Even with the short comings and rewards of fame, I knew that this is what it will be like.

What advice will you give to famous stars like Prince or Madonna. Or extremely famous superstar like Michael Jackson?

G-o-d I don't think they need any of my advice. I love them. I think they are fantastic.

Has it become problematic for you to enjoy basic privacy?

No. It's not difficult, because of the nature of my business, being a drag queen, I still walk around and nobody knows who I am. Some people do, but I can handle that. I think it's fantastic.

Ever had a role model in your life?

Oh! I've always used role models. I've always used the stars as my guiding light. My first role model was probably Diana Ross, and then.... I don't consider myself a christian, but I really, really dig Jesus Christ. I think he's really cool. He's always been a role model for me. I'll like to be forgiving, and loving and to be able to access all of my God given power. I think that's what I'll like to do.

Do you have any favorite singer/singers?

My favorite singer is Diana Ross. And I love Luther Vandross, David Bowie, Taylor Dayne. I love powerful singers. I love Dionne Warwick, Martha Walsh. I can go on. In short I love music.

Favorite film/films?

My favorite film of all time will have to be *Wizard of Oz*, because it really talks about this life here on this planet. About how you can go on searching for something very substantial only to realize that you have it inside of you all along. Yes I love *Wizard of Oz*, *Grease*, *Mommy Dearest*, *Mahogany* and *Network*. All

those movies.

You are quite thoughtful and philosophical. Do you find enough time to read?

I do. I read a lot. I've always been sort of like an observer on this planet, sort of like an outsider. I've had the time to be thoughtful. I've not been one to stick with the pack, I've always been my own person. I have to attribute that to my mother who was very thoughtful, very rebellious. She was the one. The thing I learned that I wasn't aware of before I wrote my autobiography, was how much I had gotten from her in terms of being my own person. She moved to another planet about two years ago.

Did you in any way make your mother aware of how much importance she meant to you?

Oh yes. She knew. I was never shy about telling her how much I loved her.

Do you have any favorite opera?

Madame Butterfly.

Why?

I think because it's such a beautiful story of hope, want, sorrow and tragedy.

Jazz?

Jazz is powerful, beautiful and great. I love Billie Holliday.

Who is your favorite person in your life?

I think the favorite person in my life is me.

It's all about regarding the self and the self only, isn't it? Who is your favorite actor?

I think I will have to say, Charles Nelson Riley.

Who is he?

He's a queer actor.

Favorite city?

N-e-w Y-o-r-k City.

New York City?

Oh yes! the best city in the world.

How long have you lived here for?

I first came to New York in 1982. I moved back to New York again in 1984, but couldn't make it, then I moved back to Atlanta. Later I moved back to New York in 1987 and I've been here ever since.

You have such great teeth. I wonder what kind of toothpaste do you favor.

Actually I use lots of different ones. I like the ones with natural....

Like Tom of Maine?

I love Tom of Maine, but I do baking soda a lot of the time.

Do you find it easy to locate the right kind of makeup for your complexion?

No it's not hard at all. I use MAC makeup. MAC has color for everyone, that's why they chose me as a spokes model. MAC makeup is for all races, gender, sexes, etc. It's everything, and I think RuPaul really represents all of that.

Your contract with MAC is truly historical in that it broke racial and gender boundaries for the first time in the cosmetic

industry. Do you see this as a trend? I mean, do you think other cosmetic lines will follow the example that MAC has set by using someone like you?

No absolutely not. MAC is totally a maverick in terms of the cosmetic industry standards. The truth of the matter is that we as a society haven't really progressed that far. MAC is an incredible company and that's why they chose me. In terms of the major cosmetic companies, they still have a problem hiring African girls to push their makeup. They still have problem hiring Asian people to push their makeup. I mean, MAC is light years ahead of the rest of the pack.

So you really don't think that MAC has set a trend in the cosmetic industry by using you?

I wish it will become a trend, but the way I see it, those other companies are light years behind MAC.

That's very unfortunate. Tell me, which is your favorite aspect of makeup: eyeliner, rouge, lipstick, or....?

I have to say right now that my favorite type of makeup, is MAC block-powder. It's wonderful. It's got these wonderful ingredients that soak up oil. Believe it or not it really keeps the face matte for a very long, long, time.

What is your favorite food?



Photo: Ikt

Ru working the limousine

It will have to be Mexican food. But I can't eat it a lot. It's very fattening. So I end up eating lots of salad, fruits, vegetables and grilled chicken. Stuff like that. But I l-o-v-e Mexican food.

It seems that you are very watchful of your diet.

Yes I am. I have to watch it, because it's not easy to fit into those slinky outfits that I use.

Right. How was it like meeting Bill

Cosby? I saw the picture of you two together.

He was very sweet to me and very funny. I think all the celebrities I have met have been very nice, because they realize that they themselves are also drag queens. Mainly because there's a personae that one may use on stage that people see. Then there's also the person backstage who is different from the stage personae. I think RuPaul epitomizes the whole dichotomy.

Terrific. Ru, what is your favorite color to wear?

I like bright colors. I like wearing red.

What color dominates in the interior of your house beautiful?

Well, I just bought an apartment, and I'm redecorating it now. Because my life is so flashy out in the world, I like my house to be much more calm and relaxed. So I use a lot of earth tones, with splashes of brightness. But mainly earth tones, with some yellows and creams.

What do you find RuPaul doing in the year 1999?

RuPaul will be running the White House.

That's great. I think the country will be more than ready for you then. Under what sign are you born?

I'm scorpio. I was born Nov. 17th 1960.

Iké Udé

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When Margaret Wertheim was a little girl, growing up in Australia, she was fascinated by physics and mathematics. Her hero was Einstein and her dream, she writes, was to see "relativity and quantum mechanics... united." What Wertheim is referring to is the Holy Grail of modern physics: a grand "theory of everything" that would describe all forces in the universe, from the super-galactic to the sub-nucleic. But when Wertheim got deeper into physics, in high school and at university, what she discovered was that the pursuit of this theory was almost exclusively in the hands of men—and that the world view underlying the theory reflected a "masculinist" perspective that was centuries old. Frustrated with the boys-only atmosphere of institutional physics, Wertheim left the field and became a well-known science writer—though she has also found time to produce TV documentaries on science and appear, during a short stint as a model, on the cover of *Australian Vogue*. Her book, *Pythagoras's Trousers: God, Physics and the Gender Wars*, is published by Times Books in August.

Stephen Greco: Margaret, I know you idolized Einstein as a child, but did you also dream of becoming a model?

Margaret Wertheim: Most little girls do, I think, because it's something that's presented to us as the image of quintessential female achievement.

Yet you also felt free to think about a career in science?

Probably from the time I was six, or even younger, I loved mathematics and was very good at it. I didn't really know what it meant to be a scientist, but I did have it in my head that this was something I wanted to do.

So how did the modeling happen?

It's very simple. I have an identical twin sister who, at one point, was going out with a fashion photographer. When he found out that we were twins he wanted to take some pictures of us together, and that became a kind of a thing. But the novelty wore off fairly quickly, and then we both modeled a bit as individuals. The truth of the matter is that I did it for a total of nine months. We're not talking about a major section of my life here.

Was your family supportive of anything you wanted to do?

My mother was supportive. She believed that women could do anything, at a time when that certainly wasn't the general view.

You say that if men and women had been working together, the history of physics would have been different, because men and women look at the world differently. Can you explain that? You challenge some current research that indicates that structure of girls' brains and boys' brains differ at birth.

I don't believe that differences in intellect have anything to do with biology. Nothing I've seen—and I've read quite extensively about this—holds up the view

that there are innate structural differences between men's and women's brains. What is undoubtedly true is that there is some sort of feedback between experience and physiology—so if people are deprived of certain kinds of experience, certain kinds of links don't get reinforced in the brain. And we live in a culture that does encourage certain kinds of cognitive activities in boys and not in girls. So by the time men and women reach adulthood, men are, on the whole, better at certain kinds of things than women, and vice versa.

So the precepts you cite as having perpetuated inequality in physics over the centuries—that Woman represents the material and the earthly, while Man represents the immaterial, the divine—become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Yes. Perhaps there are emotional differences between men and women that are due to physiological things, like hormones, but I don't believe that cognitive differences are innate.

In your book, you name lots of women scientists who have been denied their due, and whose work did not achieve the fruition it might have done in a non-sexist environment—women like Hypatia in the fourth century, Margaret Cavendish in the seventeenth century, Lise Meitner in the twentieth century. I'm wondering how different the world might have been—physically, in terms of inventions—if these women and others like them had been able to work unimpeded.

The main difference, I think, is that we would not have had such a mechanistic world picture. The emergence in the seventeenth century of the mechanistic model, which described the world as a machine rather than as some sort of organism, was bound up in the dismissal of an organic world view as "feminine."

Can you expand on that as a science fiction writer might do? What would a less mechanistic, more organic world view mean for us in everyday life? Would we have had, say, a medicine that's less about cutting and more about touching?

There's no reason to think that we couldn't have had surgery. But we would not have insisted on seeing humanity as separate from nature. That's the main thing. I don't think that we would have had this obsession with the objectivity, both figurative and literal. We would have seen ourselves as more embedded in nature. Now, whether or not we would have developed specific technologies is very hard to say...

But that's exactly what I want to know.

One thing you could say is that maybe we would not have had so much technology that's about cutting things up. For instance, the modern day mining industry is very much based on the notion that Man is separate from nature, and that Man can have power over nature and thunder around and cut it up. If women had been more involved, I think we would have seen less boring and cutting and drilling kinds of technologies, and perhaps we would have seen less cutting and drilling kinds of medicine.

You say that it was a kind of religious thinking made it possible to shut women out of the "priesthood" of physics. But weren't there also, in fact, conspicuous pseudo-scientific theories about women—their "temperament," their "constitution," and their "function"—that encouraged sexism in science?

Aristotle was the one who really introduced this into western thinking in a big way, in the fourth century

BC. He believed that women were effectively defective men and, as such, weren't fully human. He believed that women had both defective bodies and defective souls. What happened was that when Greek science was rediscovered by the west in the late middle ages, Aristotelian misogyny got taken up and incorporated into western Christianity. But it was certainly something that Christianity was prepared to take up with vengeance.

It was helpful to them, was it?

It was very important because it was at the root of having universities be created as institutions from which women were barred. From the beginning of western education, women were denied a place.

Do you have a sense of what kind of personal toll the lack of support took on the women you write about?

One of the prices that some of them paid is never being able to get married. Both Emmy Noether [1882-1935] and Lise Meitner [1878-1968], for instance, were never married, and they don't seem to have had any romantic engagements in their lives. I think that was very much linked to the fact that they were such non-traditional women that many men could not deal with them, at a time when women were supposed to stay home and raise the kids. The truth is that a lot of the early women who managed to get PhDs dropped out of science when they got married. It was almost like you were offered a choice between marriage and a career as a scientist. **I find that so sad.**

Many of these women were forced to pay a very tragic price for their careers, which is why only the ones who were absolutely dedicated and obsessed could get through.

You inventory what woman have lost by being shut out of institutional science over the years— positions, reputations, salaries, prizes, etc. It shocked me, for instance, to learn that since the Nobel Prizes were first awarded, in 1901, only nine women have been awarded prizes in science, as compared with the four hundred men who have been. But what also interests me is what science itself has lost by excluding women.

The biological sciences are one area where women participate now in quite significant numbers, and one of the major things that women biologists are concentrating on is the role of cooperation, rather than competition, in both evolution and the sustenance of life on Earth. And what one notices is that since woman have come into the field, men are also beginning to start paying attention to the cooperation. One of the things that's really important is that when women come into the field they change the culture of the field, so that men as well as women are enabled to think in new ways.

That's great!

The general thing that I see women helping change is the notion of objectivity. As it becomes more acceptable to have a subjective viewpoint, we look more for links between things and interrelationships between different parts of the system. We're seeing that in chaos and complexity theory, as well, which are more about studying systems in whole rather than isolated parts.

Why? Is there a significant number of women working in those areas?

The majority are men, but I don't think it's a coincidence that this field has begun to develop at a time

when women are getting into science in general.

I want to get into this so-called "theory of everything"—TOE as it is referred to. You have challenged the physics establishment for demanding huge amounts of money to build super accelerators that would help formulate and prove this theory, which physicists claim would reveal "the mind of God." Is it your contention that women would envision the theory any differently than men, or go about searching for it in some other way?

It's my sense not so much that women would have a different way of searching for this theory, but that women would be less inclined to explain the world in this way at all. Because although it's an interesting theory— and I, for one, would love to see it come together— the problem is that pursuing such a theory cannot be done without vast expenditure. What I see with women scientists— obviously there are exceptions— is that they are more inclined to be drawn to projects where they can see concrete social value. And the social value of the TOE quest becomes less and less evident by the minute.

But are women physicists any less interested than

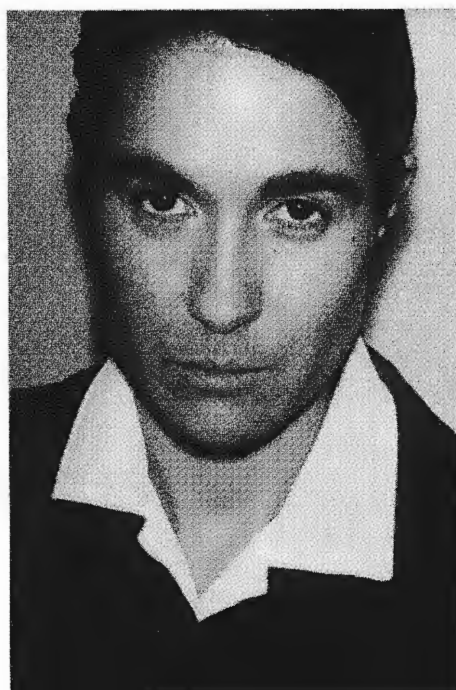


Photo: Ike Ude

men in, let's say, getting to the stars, or do they envision the existence of the ten dimensions often said to be necessary for the TOE any differently from men?

Well, I'm personally very interested in finding this ten-dimensional thing, but to say that one is interested in it doesn't mean that one therefore thinks that society should put up ten billion dollars for it. I'm personally interested in fourteenth century art, but I don't think we should spend billions and billions of dollars restoring every bit of it. By the way, astrophysics happens to be a field where there are a reasonable number of women.

Margaret, didn't you feel that the public was ill-served by the lack of intelligent debate about the recent defunding of the big super collider project? The press made it seem as though the choice were either to continue funding it or return to the stone age.

Oh, I agree with you. The situation today is a little like

that in the sixteenth century, when the Scholastics were playing abstruse mind games— formal exercises in logic that questioned the nature of reality. It wasn't that these people were fools, or not asking interesting questions. What killed Scholasticism was that the questions became so abstract and arcane that they were meaningless to the lives of ordinary people. And, as a result, modern science emerged as an alternative way of thinking, that did answer questions with real practical applications to daily human life. TOE scientists have gone so far up their own tracks and away from any connection to real life, that the public is beginning to turn away from them. And if they pursue that direction, the public will turn away wholly.

You really pull out the stops at the end of the book, when you challenge the physicists who purport to reveal, by way of the TOE, what Stephen Hawking calls "the mind of God." "We must not allow physicists to bamboozle us with half-baked theologies," you write. I know you admire Hawking, but don't you also shake your finger at him?

Oh, definitely. For physicists to use God as a PR front for their own activities is not only illegitimate, it's absolutely hypocritical. After all these are the same people who still rail against the church for its treatment of Galileo. I think that they have just cottoned on to God as a PR mascot in a way that is so cynical, they should be taken to task for it. It doesn't serve science, and in most cases, it's a lie.

I understand you left institutional physics because you found the atmosphere untenable.

Where I went to university, in Australia in the late 1970s, there were no women on the staff and almost no women students. A lot of the time I was the only woman in my class, and I found that immensely alienating. I was living a double life— there was school and then I had my friends outside.

Did that make you angry?

I used to get very angry at a lot of my friends— musicians and artists who would expect me to talk endlessly about their latest record or exhibition, and who then wouldn't give me the time of day to talk about physics. It would drive me insane.

Was that structural sexism at work?

Well, it happened with women as well as with men.

But women can be sexist too, can't they?

Sure, but this wasn't so much a sex issue as the fact that, at that stage, physics wasn't cool. If I were at university now, it would be easier for two reasons. The image of physics itself has improved immensely— people like Paul Davies and Stephen Hawking have definitely made it seem a much hipper activity— and there's much greater awareness of issues about gender on campus now.

A lot has changed on campus since the 1970s. But what about in the practice of science?

I don't think institutional physics has changed much since the 1970s. What I think has changed is the public perception of it. When I was at university, we were still relatively close to the Vietnam War stuff, and physics was seen as part of the machine that produced weapons for the war. I remember people being horrified when I said that I was studying physics— whereas now it has a whole new public front. It's not associated anymore in the public mind with weaponry— although, ironically, more and more funding for physics now is provided by the military.

I felt your pain in the passages you wrote about

(continued on next page)

Manicure

-Brian Jackson



Photos: Pito Collas

To many, manicures are associated with privilege. However, grooming should not be restricted solely on class. It's not about making airs, but brightening the outlook and cultivating a kind of aesthetic ideal that goes beyond fixed ideas of gender.

Women are expected to look lovely, and though many men may never consider having a manicure, to not be allowed the option based on gender is just as ridiculous as a woman not being able to wear pants.

There are almost as many manicure shops in New York City as there are Gaps. Unlike a massage that takes place behind closed doors, manicure are usually done right in the window where passersby can observe. The barber shops that provide these services are today almost obsolete so men must now sit next to the women. As a man, in an atmos-

phere long associated with femininity, this can be an interesting experience, both disjunctive and fulfilling.

There are those who can't fathom the idea of a man having his nails done. These are the people I most enjoy their confusion or embarrassment. They are probably the ones that need to see it being done. They need to see the release of tension that I feel as another person takes my hand in theirs. They need to see me getting these hands massaged. They need to see it. That's why I sit in that window. Because once categories define our being, we can no longer define ourselves.

The average manicure ranges anywhere from five to fifteen dollars, depending on venue.

It's not about manicures and it's not about whether or not you are a man — but are you a gentle one.

(continued from last page)

how hard it is, still, for little girls to find role models in science. You mention that Hollywood hasn't gone far enough in giving us role models of scientific women. There is Little Man Tate but no Little Woman Tate. Do you see any progress on this front?

There's that Star Trek spinoff that at least has a woman captain, but we don't yet have a woman Spock.

There were Uhura and Crusher, too, in Star Trek. Both, I believe, were promoted to the rank of captain.

Things are definitely better than they were, but what we've yet to see is a female mathematical brain.

Well, you've produced TV shows. Is that something you might create for us some day?

I've always done documentaries, not drama. But I sometimes dream of writing a novel that will somehow star a woman in mathematics.

Do you think the fact that women have been closed out of mathematics and physics helps account for the huge amount of great science fiction that's been written by women?

I've never thought about that, but it probably does have an effect. What I notice about women's science fiction is that it's much more thoughtful about the role of science in society than men's stuff is. And that's true not just today, but throughout the history of science fiction. Margaret Cavendish wrote one of the very first science fiction books ever, in the seventeenth century, called *The Blazing World*. It's all about using science for the good of humanity. People and animals commune with one another, and Cavendish herself appears as the queen of this world. This was one of the world's earliest utopian books. And, of course, there was Mary Shelley. **You've made me think about all the women who may have been born in rural or inner-city America, or in some third world country, who will never be able to mature into**

productive scientists.

Yeah, I think that is bound to be the case. I mean, if even people like Marie Curie almost gave up in despair, before she ever set foot inside a university, then how many women did give up? I'm sure that there are many, many, many of them. The loss in terms of human potential is nothing short of tragic. And it is still going on.

You mention that the Harvard physics faculty extended tenured professorship to a woman only in the 1990s.

And, to this day, Princeton still doesn't have a tenured women professor in physics.

It's appalling. You must be expecting your book to act as a force of change. I certainly hope so.

Stephen. There are two things I'd like the book to do. To really be a book about physics that a much wider group of people can understand, particularly women. And to open up the discussion about physics, which has been protected from criticism in a kind of priestly way. There's a real need for a much broader public debate about what we want from physics: where should our physics dollars be going; how we should educate physicists; whether we can encourage a wider diversity of people to enter the field— not just women, but all marginalized people — so it's not just this incredibly elitist, upper class, white boy activity. We have these discussions about politics, but we need to have them about science, too. ©

JOEY ARIAS (continued from page 15)

Other than Billie Holiday, what other voices or personae inhabit Joey Arias?

There's been a naughty cupid and a siren mermaid from the depths of water polluted by Man, that was a theatrical message about our destroying the Earth and ourselves. And then

there is Justine. She's a take-off of a Ruth Meyer Supervixen, more powerful than a man. She's become very popular. Actually, I've liberated myself sexually through Justine, performing live sex shows, fellatio and other things on stage.

So you own Justine?

Yes. She breaks all the barriers. In fact she's in the movie *To Wong Fu, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*.

That film is one of a bumper crop of recent drag films. How do you interpret this current mainstream interest?

Well, England, Japan, Italy have had theatrical gender impersonation for a while now. America is a new country and has started to come into its own, to find its own history. Drag theater is one of the last taboos to be broken. So now, it's being exploited. Even actors are tired of playing traditional masculine roles.

Are stereotypes being broken, then?

Yes. Patrick Swayze said it's one of the most challenging acting roles of his entire career, performing drag. Look at Divine. He was an amazing actor. He should have gotten an Academy Award in his lifetime. Maybe in years from now, he'll receive an honorary award.

The John Waters aesthetics was too ahead of its time to achieve mainstream legitimacy and appreciation?

Yes, although they had their underground following. I hope Wigstock and the other films will be accepted but there is still Middle America, the right wing, NeoNazis etc. to deal with, you know.

What, Joey, has this artform taught you that you might want to share with others?

Not to take life so seriously. It's way too short. Basically, it's about coming to terms with your own feelings. Look at other people as living organisms like yourself. We are all a speck in this amazing galaxy, all part of the same energy. ©



Photo: Sattaro

Renée Cox the Man

Itinerary:
SHOWWORLD at Times Square
East Village gay Sex Club
New York Dolls
Babydolls
B. Smiths
42nd Street Bookstore

The purpose of my adventure in becoming a "drag king" was to experience heterosexual and homosexual male spaces designed specifically for sex and sexual titillation.

My main reason for the visits was to find out what men were seeing, seeking and reacting to in these sexual zones. During my visits, it became clear that the whole notion of performance runs rampant from the onset of donning the clothing or features (ie.: facial hairs) of the male gender to actually venturing into these places. The idea of my passing as man was easily unrecognizable in the heterosexual settings because straight men don't carefully look at other men. However, in the gay domain, this is not

the case. I must admit that I was 'found out' (as I was leaving the East Village Gay Sex Club) by two Latinos guys. One of them immediately stated to the other, "That's a woman!"

Importantly, it must be noted that the overall experience of gender-switching is as easy as putting on a wig. Meaning, in each setting, I simply used my glasses as a shield to prevent eye contact and any possible invitations. The heterosexual performance was destabilizing — opposed to the homosexual scenes—due to the fact the female exotic dancers were aggressively trying to pick me up without detecting that I was in disguise. Also, just when one of the dancers (we'd bought a drink for and invited to our table) finally recognized I was incognito, she innocently inquired: "Why are you wearing a mustache? Are you a reggae artist?" Therefore, she clearly still had no clue that I was a woman.

To my amusement, it was amazing how the choreographers responded to my

disguise as a man. They felt the need to touch my hair, and were basically conditioned to perform stereotypically for men. In regards to the gay clubs, I had the sense the clubs are a plus for its clientele considering that the sexual gratification was more immediate. This in part is due to the fact that the dancers are dancing for men like themselves. The opportunity for the men to openly masturbate was greater, and the men had more spaces and corners to view various sexual acts that aroused them.

In conclusion, this project made me realize that men, hetero or gay, are like dogs in these environments. There was a feeling of power, but it was pathetic, it was merely based on lust and desire: I was unable to find pleasure in these spaces. The gay locales seemed much more direct in its sexual goals, whereas the hetero places leave you feeling excited and probably calling your girlfriend at 3am to see if you can come over and fuck. For me as a woman, it was simply un insightful. ☉

working the ball

aRUDE interview with
Brian Lantelm



aRUDE: Where were you born?

Brian Lantelm: I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

In retrospect, is there anything that may have prepared you for the work you are doing now, photographing drag queens?

Yes. Isolation. Feelings of identification with people who are considered outsiders by the status quo.

Are you saying that the drag queens live in isolation and may be lonely, whereas people perceive them as happy, glamorous people.

Yes. There is lot of loneliness in the scene. Of course there is the glamorous appearance.

And judging from the Dorian Corey's pictures you shot, she seemed fulfilled and glamorous.

Yes, but she was also sick. Those photographs were taken 4 months before her death. There were lots of secrets: the mummy being the main one.

Did Dorian ever wear men's clothes at "her" home?

No. She wore only women's clothes, comfortable slip-ons and such.

How long do you fancy doing this work (documenting drag queens and the Balls), is this a life time passion and interest?

It's a commitment.

How are you coping with the attention you are getting now from your work?

It might be at odds with some of the confidentiality, or the trusting relationship that I have formed with my subjects.

What originally inspired you towards this genre of photography?

It is an extension of myself. I have been doing this for a long time. It's a commitment. My subjects are an extension of myself. They can express certain concerns that one may have in a more general kind of way.

Why did you choose to use camera instead of video?

Actually I studied film making at Conell University.

Do you see any relationship between your college films and your photography, and what were you filming then?

I made this earlier film called *Seascape*. It was a three minute film of my aunt on a beach, inspired in part by this one scene from a Bette Davis' film where the camera sensually traced her figure from her feet up, to reveal her glamorous face. I did a similar film using my aunt. In a way this film informed my interest in glamour.

What is your work process like?

I develop and print my own films. I have no assistants. I know that many photographers have their works developed and printed for them, but I believe that part of photography is printing. Printing is an

important part of photography.

Besides your day job which augment your income, what is your average evening like?

Work. Developing and printing films, going to the Balls and photographing the events. Now I photograph every sunday at Sally's. There's a huge Ball extravaganza every sunday. It's quite interesting. Then there's the Marc Ballroom and various other locations in New Jersey.

How do the drag queens commute to these Balls, do they go dressed or dress upon arrival, considering the elaborate costumes they utilize.

Some of them commute via public transportation while carrying their outfits in their bag. Some of them dress ahead of time and would travel in rented trucks or their own cars. The trucks serve to carry large props for the "categories" they may walk. And some of these "girls" are twentyfour hour pre-ops, so they don't have to worry about "standing out" in public. The pre-ops especially can travel without being spooked.

When was the first time you photographed a Ball?

Well, I've been photographing Balls for 8 years. I think the first time I photographed a Ball was in 1987.

How did it start?

I first met Dorian Corey in 1983 when she was working at the *Phoenix*, a club at 8th ave. and 13th street, which later became *The Greenwich Pub*, which was ran by Sally. Sally later moved uptown and opened "*Sally's Hideaway*". The "*Hideaway*" got destroyed by fire, so Sally moved it to its present location now known as "SALLY'S 2", which is where I now photograph all the time. I immediately got along very well with Dorian and I maintained partial contact with her. Then one night in 1987 I ran into her again in Cherry Grove, Fire Island. She invited me to her Ball. Before then, I've never been to a Ball before. It was June 5th 1987. I have the flier. It was the annual "Harlem Fantasy Ball", which she gave in conjunction with Pepper Labeija. I attended the ball, and coincidently, Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* was being filmed at the Ball. Dorian was very accommodating, and generous. She was in the front collecting the money. However, the Ball ended in a fight.

Was the Ball terribly crowded?

Very crowded.

What was the audience like?

They were mainly from Harlem, some from Brooklyn, and entirely African-American Ball crowd. I'm often the only caucasian in these balls. On our table (matter of fact) was Paris Dupree and the film *Paris Is Burning* was named after

the Ball she she threw also called "Paris Is Burning". So the film title of *Paris Is Burning* was directly borrowed from Paris Dupree's Ball.

How was the security at the Ball?

There was none. As I said before the Ball ended in a fight, which was very frightening. So I didn't go back for a whole year.

In your estimation, do you think that the BALLS were fairly judged without partiality?

Oh never! They still aren't.

So it's fairly predictable who the winner will be.

Of course.

Is it accurate to attribute the "Ball Fights" to the partiality practiced by its judges.

Oh yes! Not only does the unfair judgement create an atmosphere for fights, it's also killing the drag world by discouraging many people from participating in contests. It's a big problem. It will never change.

Are the "mothers" of the various houses aware that some of the participants feel disgruntled by the unfair practices exhibited by the judgement of the "mothers" themselves? Does anyone care at all?

It depends on who's Ball it is. Whoever throws the Ball wins. It's amazing, but it's part of the Ball scene.

Of all the drag queens, who was the first to be photographed by you?

It has to be Sade. She is a very heavy drag queen. Even fat. She sings live. She does this Patti LaBelle kind of thing. She has a great voice. She's wonderful. Very nice. She was the very first drag queen I ever photographed in my studio.

Who was the first notable dragster you photographed?

The first really notable drag queen who I photographed at a Ball was probably Angie Extravaganza. The photo I took of her at that Ball gave me the inspiration to continue. It was such a tableau. It made me realize what was possible. It opened up a whole new world for me.

Did you share the elation you got from photographing Angie with her?

I gave the picture to Angie a couple of years later. I ran into her at the Palladium before an AIDS benefit. Luckily I had the picture with me and I gave it to her. She screamed! All the other extravaganza entourage with her all screamed. Later I gave her a few more copies. Angie love having her pictures taken.

Between Angie Extravaganza and Dorian, who did you find more compatible in temperament?

Oh Dorian was one of the most compatible people in my life. She was one of my very, very closest friend ever. She had a

(continued on page 65)

William Stern

Excerpt from Notes on Masculinity



Photo: Ike Udé

Since there is no consensus, and no consensus possible (Was **Ghandi** masculine? Was **George Washington**, in powdered wig and knee breeches, masculine? Was **Hitler** masculine?), generalizations about masculinity are worse than useless, they are destructive.

Are we all unanimous with butch? Macho? Merely male? If so, then are *liker chicks*, wife beaters, and transvestites all equally masculine? Doubt it, in fact. I doubt the whole fragmented concept of masculinity. For whom was it constructed. I wonder, and who does it serve? I ask because I personally never have been served anything but ill by the idea (read: ideology) of masculinity.

How can a characteristic like masculinity, which has to fit nearly half the world's vastly different population lay claim to anything like normativity? Since there is no consensus, and no consensus possible (Was **Ghandi** masculine? Was **George Washington**, in powdered wig and knee breeches, masculine? Was **Hitler** masculine?), generalizations about masculinity are worse than useless, they are destructive. More specific and informed inquiries into, say,

the difference between a "feminized" image vs. a materialized one or a consideration of the "strong woman" vs. the pathetic machismo of bruised male ego, would lead us farther into understanding and appreciation than the simplistic and erroneous elision of masculinity with power and strength.

Power and strength (be it inner or outer) are not "masculine" qualities, and the abuse of them not unproblematically positive. They belong to whomever has them; possession is nine-tenths of the law of gender. If women, queers or any group disenfranchised by straight, "white" male hegemony creates their own sites of power, which many do through art, music, and political activism, then I say, more power to them. ©

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My Name Is...

I have always embraced my given name with such ease. The earliest memories my name invoke for me are pitted with confusion and fear.

It is not a name like David or Robert, to which a specific gender might be readily assigned. Rather, it is an equal opportunity name, one that could also be given to a girl.

As a child, I was repeatedly reminded of its threatening potential, which is, femininity. "What kind of name is that?" was a customary response, suspicion aired when strangers asked and I replied. There was an unspoken accusation against the selection of something for which I bore no responsibility. To my parents it was just that, a beautiful name. Not "The Name That Dare Not Speak Its Name."

By the time I discovered that it was nuanced with gender ambiguity, I already knew that Society did not condone gender-blurring. Which came first, the ambiguous name or the effeminate child? To what extent was it a self-fulfilling prophesy and how much did it contribute to my eventual sexual orientation? These questions no longer concern me, nor beg explanation and analysis. I simply am.

I have witnessed and been on the receiving end of Society's fear towards what might be a missing link, daringly bridging "The Great Gender Divide." What vexes is that I appear to be not quite one or the other and as such defy classification. The fact I would be respected and accepted in other cultures offers no consolation. I choose to remain in this culture, in this time.

The legacy of this name continues even now: I receive junk mails addressed in p.c. code to "ms.;" Nynex operators tempt me

with their latest convenient services by first requesting to speak with Ms. Penco: without seeing me. Personnel Managers invite me to interview for positions, expecting to meet quota requirements by hiring a female.

With the passage of time, pain replaced fear, itself to boil over into anger. At some point, this anger has become tempered with strength and acceptance.

Is it worth noting that in Cyberspace, users may play virtual gender Hide-and-Seek by adopting "handless" which do not necessarily reveal biological gender. Will gender lose its relevance in the dawning CyberAge?

Today, the mantle of ambiguity sits more comfortably on my shoulders. I gender-jump at will and with alacrity, all it requires is an additional "e" to transform Rene Emmanuel, Grade A, Societally Approved male into Renee Emmanuele, gender-challenged alter ego, quick, effortless, verboten.

Detecting this primal affront, Society's Quality Control Dept. is aroused into a state of red-hot or hot-pink alert. Verbal hounds erupt into their fiercest a cappella renditions of the classics, "Faggot," "Sissy," "Mary." If this produces no results, physical abuse, shock therapy and psychiatric intervention are authorized. At all costs, the Deity which rules in "The Land Where Men Are Men And Women Are Women" will have its revenge.

The Gender Guards are deployed, that elite Corps whose sole mission is to deliver all gender transgressors to permanent confinement in one of the two cells monochromatically marked "Male" or "Female."

I have employed every permissible and impermissible camouflage to dodge my pursuers: I have worn color-coordinated buzz-cut wigs, sipped coffee from teacups with weights attached to my pinky to hold it down and drank like a fish (unfortunately my sup-

pressed lisp always returns just then.) I have kept up with Mr. Jones and smoke pack after pack of Marlboros. I now possess an "Ab Fab" pair of nicotine-plated teeth. I have squirmed through reruns of every John Wayne movie and gingerly practiced his brut swagger to the accompaniment of RuPaul's "You better work!" Once, in a moment of particular desperation, I even contemplated the supreme act of illusion: "Working Out." My natural allergy to self-debasement preserved me from such a fate.

No guise has been too extreme: I paint callouses onto my palms and ensure that the front page of the N.Y. Times Sports section visibly sticks out of my backpack. (Never mind that the date reads Sept. 26th 1953.) One day, the gig was almost up when a jock, a total stranger asked me in a packed subway car to name my all-time favorite football player. I took the requisite three minutes to consider my response, looked him straight in the eye and loudly announced "Michael Jordan." Unlike Lot's wife, I did not look back when I exited at the next stop.

At night, I insert Ice T. CDs into my stereo and turn the volume all the way up. While I entertain my neighbors thus, I get into bed, pull the cover over my head and lip-synch to Maria Callas on my Walkman.

I start my day with a ritual á la Aretha Franklin, "The morning I wake up, before I put on my makeup, I say a little prayer for you." with regard for my fellow gender gymnasts.

I end it by returning to the words of Audre Lorde "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

by René Penco

P.S. No names have been changed to protect the innocent. ©

Photo: Claudia Pisani

rené/e
penco



Bathrooms:

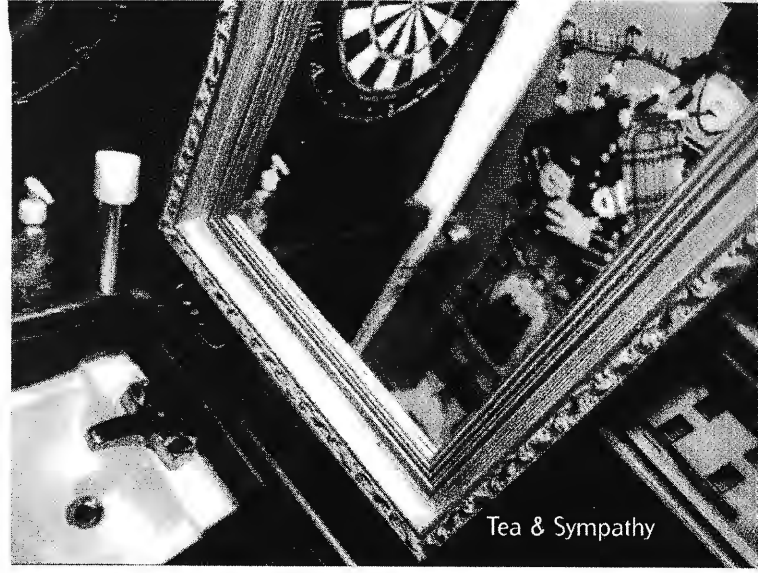
urinary apartheid

by Steve Wilson photos by Erin Mayes

Human waste knows no gender. Yet, at the expense of sounding like some whiny stand-up comedian, an egregious disparity of quality and comfort separates “Men” rooms from “Ladies” rooms in most public buildings. Sexual assumptions have assured that no matter the quality of the institution, be it dive bar or bourgeois stomping ground, male bathrooms are inevitably sub-par in design and maintenance. The root of the problem may lie in popular psychology. Men are perceived as linear creatures, needing and desiring nothing more than a quick masturbatory fix with no frills for the emission of waste. Just one shot at the urinal and that’s that. But females have no urinal equivalent. Supposedly, they need a room in which to be cyclical, a place where they can “take their time”. This bathroom dominance would be a great stride for womankind, were it not based on the presumption that “the fairer sex” needs to be pampered when excreting. This sampling of New York establishments shows that no bathroom, regardless of locale or patronage, is free from this bizarre brand of sexism.



Tea & Sympathy, 1st St. Cafe, Baby Jakes (East and West Village) - Unisex bathrooms, the way of the future? The advantages are numerous, privacy being chief among them. As an added plus, one-bathroom budget savings seem to inspire greater creativity. Ah, the joys of equality: one toilet, one roll, one last chance to make a better way for the bathroom culture of tomorrow.



Village Idiot (Chelsea) - The accommodations for men (left) in this rowdy country bar are tighter than Conway Twitty’s jeans. Note the use of the urinal as an ashtray. Not pictured: lack of a mirror and cold water (one temperature: piping hot). The ladies room



Jezebel's (Hell's Kitchen) - Both are posh, true, but some bathrooms are more equal than others. One could hold a dance party in the women's washroom (left), a dance party with lace hangings and a wall-sized mirror, no less. The men's room (right), alas, is just large enough for a light doze on the comfy chair.



KGB (East Village) - Most of the men's room (left) is too dark and dank to be captured on film, but it's obvious the fall of Communism has been just as difficult on hepcat hangouts as it has been for mother Russia. The doors in the ladies' room (right) may be poorly designed, but at least they have 'em.



Subway Inn (Upper East Side) - The men's room (right) is broken down worse than many of the patrons of this dive, making the real subway a better bathroom choice. The women's room (left) is a veritable palace in comparison.

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1995-96

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This exhibition and its programs have been made possible by The Charles Engelhard Foundation, the Cultural Service, of the French Embassy, Kapor Family Foundation, Barbara Fish Lee, Thomas H. Lee, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Peter and Eileen Norton. The ICA also acknowledges the ongoing support of the Arthur F. Blanchard Trust/Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company, Boston Globe Foundation, the Massachusetts and ICA members and patrons.

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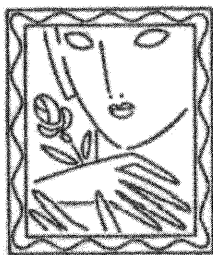
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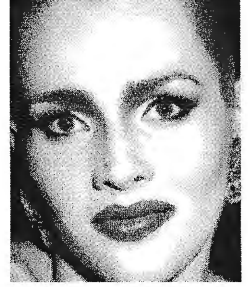
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THE TRANSVESTITE'S FACE



-Matthew DeBord

If I wrote a book called *The World As I Found It*, I should have to include a report on my body, and I should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject, for it alone could not be mentioned in that book.

—Ludwig Wittgenstien, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

What's in the face of a transvestite? Not the lower reaches, but the Face, where masses of human memory parade in small movements and occasionally licentious winks. A transvestite's face is the locus of a knowing deception, calculated and provocative, obscuring traditional definitions of gender while affirming the perfect power of choice. Not drag, this, but trans—trans as in transgressive, the mode of the future. Transvestites are the future. They name it and give it shape. They see through the skittish present and reinvent the moldering past. Look around: everyone's a transvestite. Some children of this emboldened future have just matured faster.

Is there much of a difference, after all, between the transvestite with his or her webs of style and yearning, and the dandy, with his vulpine seduction of our desires for successful haberdashery? Because I knot my tie too fat or some days wear my trousers slim and pegged, maybe spend more than the culture deems necessary on shoes, have I slipped from an attitude toward gender that will make me easy friends into an area that might court admirers? Admirers—next to confusion, the stuff of a transvestite's dreams. Transvestites aim to be admired for the strength of their decisions, for both their style and the way they willfully corrupt the expected, twist standards of taste, and defy the tyranny of the casual. A simple chic transvestite? Never seen one. Don't want to.

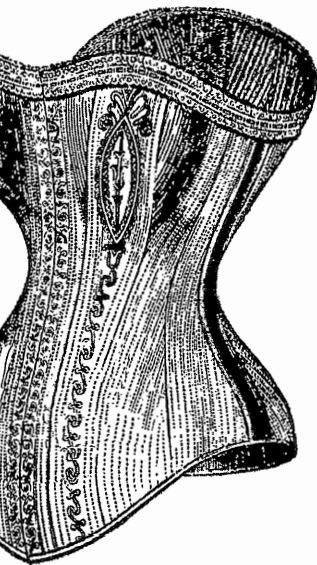
Transvestites embrace paradox, that incompletely concealed blemish in the complexion of logic, by being all that they want while sustaining all that they need. Happiness, you might conclude, is just a sleek pair of slingbacks away. Though for each violation of properly engendered identification, transvestites offer a fresh face—a face that troubles natural laws while maintaining its own smooth equanimity, hovering like a lit window in sheer darkness above a city of bodies that could, if inspected, tweezed, and prodded, reveal the ruse. Is it a game, dressing as a woman while existing as man? Study the face of a transvestite, and watch the question become irrelevant. Games are what adults play when they wish to mourn their fled childhoods. Transvestites mean business.

There's an unattributable adage that goes something like, "It doesn't matter how you play the game, it just matters that

you look good when the camera clicks." The implicit issue, of course, is one of documentation; transvestites are to gender documentation what Robert Smithson is to art: recordings of altered nature that nevertheless retain essential clues to nature's process. As natural as it is for Norman Mailer to write about fucking and for Bob Ross to paint the same crummy painting a thousand times. Transvestites are nature radicalized, the difference between nature and artifice slickly transacted through lenses clear of tint and in mirrors free of taint. "I am a camera," wrote Christopher Isherwood, intending to shatter the barrier between Romanticism's subjective prerogatives and modernism's objectifying gaze. "I am what was once only a camera," claims the transvestite, and through this claim image is restored to a physical reality. Transvestites are cameras that dress up, that improve the hackneyed mechanism of mediated identity by obviating mediation. Why do transvestites win? Because they write their own rules.

Think about the difference between an icon, a reduced version of a set of instruction for living (nominally called "language") and a sign, the product of a complex play of signification that embellishes as it argues. Transvestites inhabit the richly imagined yet exceptionally real worlds of Tennessee Williams dramas or William Faulkner novels, harsh worlds loaded with tense phrases that share space with languid and contemplative sentences. No less than the face of their language, the embodiment of the purified dialect of their tribe, transvestites consume portraits of youth and age, art and kitsch, the sacred behind its relentless screen and the profane in its wardrobe of inexhaustible options.

In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein wrote that what we cannot speak of, we must pass over in silence. While this frank admission of human futility applies to nearly everything under the sun, it holds no sway with transvestites, who speak volumes through the silent roar of their style. It was Diana Vreeland, Vogue's legendary editor and the last great unholy pleasure left to any literary aspirant of the late twentieth century, who exalted the role of style and situated it in its rightful cultural temple. "Two words for you, darling," I once repeated, "read Vogue." No one needs to read Vogue anymore; the laws of American style that it once made almost biblical, drawing them into a format that meshed text and image, have been released to the world as the transvestite finds it. Look at the face, ponder the lips, slip your eyes between the pages of a book that speaks while not speaking, whose voice defies the Augustinian anxiety about the sully of words. Voice rises from babble and attains beauty. And from this sibilance, a serenade. Maybe there was a ballgown in Wallace Stevens' closet after all. We can have no doubt that T. S. Eliot harbored transvestism in his truths: "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." You all know what do now: face yourselves. ☺



motion of gender

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What is gender? How can it
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tions of sexual identity.

This must be very destabilizing, for most people have been socialized from birth into specific gender roles, behaviors, emotions, psychology, goals and appearances. But this motif of socialization along a clearly defined "Gender Apart/heid", deprives us of our choice to express ourselves as unique individuals. After all "one is an individual, not a sex". Therefore any form of censorship or policing of an individual to conform within a "he/she" dichotomy is extremely rigid, myopic and anachronistic.

Arguably, gender war is a man's war, by men, and for men. The mere fact that feminists have engineered an oppositional response, calls our attention to the issue of male hegemony over women's affairs. It seems that the dichotomy in gender primarily privilege men. To be a man or to act like a man is thus to enjoy uncontested power over women. To act like a man is a step-up on the patriarchal ladder, whereas to be/act like a woman is a step-down that ladder.

Given the exigent benefits reaped from performing the masculine, (not unlike most men), "progressive women" have had to adopt/appropriate signs of masculinity in order to be treated, paid and respected like men. However, the mere act of performing the masculine has its limitations, and in no way guarantees patriarchal privilege. What dangers are there when women take to performing the masculine in order to share in patriarchal spoils? What happens to men who are performing/practicing the feminine? Does femininity then succumb to masculinity? Or does it subvert its power? Why can't femininity dominate or thrive on equal basis with masculinity? If gender division is eschewed altogether, what is the next space?

Or is it really about one gender serving as an alternative for the other? If one is born an individual and not a sex, then the issue of Gen/der inscribed in our psyche begs for a sound impartial reevaluation. We can begin by advocating and promulgating for an unconditional, constant and fluid interpretation of gender identities based solely on unique individual needs. No one gender is necessarily superior to the other. Nonetheless their

reciprocal difference ought to be a cause for celebration.

Undoubtedly, contemporary cross-gender practices have virtually been the domain of women. Nonetheless, when men perform the feminine, it's only as parody or a spectacle. Why are women readily allowed to perform masculinity unlike men? Are women in this instance prone to some kind of patriarchal osmosis.

What is a man? Is one ever a man? Where is the need for a man to "act like a man". Is it not enough that one is born a male? What can account for the fact that virtually all men are directly/indirectly invested in performing the masculine? One can of course see that acting like (and not necessarily being) a "man", reinforces a "Core Gender Identity", thereby maintaining the patriarchal edge.

*For the love of rouge, mascara or lipstick we are all women. But for the love of moustache, toupe, suit/tie, "stuffed crotch", we are all men. There is often the false assumption that drag queens have greater sympathy for women, more than the average man. Yet upon close examination, drag queens reveal themselves to be just like the average man they pretend not to be. Drag Kings, while "gaining" in authority by parodying/performing the masculine, ambivalently underscore the feminine status as lack. If we are to indulge the "drag" appetite and see it in the framework of its contradictions by connecting it fully with its feminine and masculine distinctions, what pictures of a man or a woman are we left to look at?

To be sure, the drag queen with all that makes him/her lovingly

**To act like a
man is a step-up
on the patri-
achal ladder,
whereas to be/
act like a
woman is a
step-down that
ladder.**

ierce and real, is the ultimate site of extravaganza, the sphere of excesses, the matrix of ultra-femme glamour, the locality of inverted desire, the domain of "womanhood" par excellence. In a typical "Ball" the average "girl's" costume requires special attention. What with mile-long plummage, lengthy press-on nails, broom length false lashes, impeccably wor-ked coif, deliciously glossed lips, "perfectly improved breasts", then there are those delightful screams, lewd laughter, the variations on "SNAPPING", the "throwing of shades", and great heights attained courtesy of high heel shoes plus!

Past this spectacle, and intoxication; the decadent revelling; past this arena of glitter, fragrance and frost, the masquerades amid the clamor and allure of the "queen's" space, is the absence of women. Excepting the occasional presence of a handful of butch dykes who ironically through affectation privilege masculinity in the "Queen's" space. Seen against this "drag" framework, women (as represented by the "girls") become but mere artifacts of patriarchy. Then one is almost tempted to prod the subtext of the term "Ball" as doubly gaining in significance: are we speaking about the testicles or extravaganza (?). But the extravaganza of "Ball" is not separable from the testicles.

During an interview with Brian Lamteln, known for his intimate portraits of drag queens, he explained that "we don't need women because we have our own "women" and that's all we need". By his own admission, Brian maintains that "it's just the right thing, the right way for drag queens to be, amongst themselves, all real, all men". In other words, the virtual reality of the "girls" becomes a glamorous substitute for real women, equally ensuring the drag queens their "Absolute insignia of maleness: a penis", neatly tucked beyond bounds.

It will be refreshing to know there are places where male practices or appropriations of femininity carry none of the stigmas of queerness associated with it in the West. We can locate the fluid nature of gender for instance among the Wodaabe of Niger, in the Igbo-Nigeria Adamma Theater, in the Japanese Kabuki Theater, etc.

In the *Nomads of Niger*, a recent book chronicling the Wodaabe, though with an unstinting ethnographic gaze, the western eyes are treated for the first time to the exquisite, malleable nature of gender as something peculiarly unbalanced, in constant flux, and necessary.

For the Wodaabe men, performing the feminine is thus a ritualized act of divine beauty, of vivacious



Wodaabe man



pomp, of serious pleasure, an astute mode of reckoning the feminine within the masculine—an act of fate that neither denies nor problematizes the so called "absolute insignia of maleness: a penis."

In performing the feminine, Wodaabe men believe that ugliness is exorcised, rid of, for only then can grace be redeemed in men. In this fluid atmosphere the love of beauty and everything for its own sake informs the human race of its finer nature, devoid of barbaric impulses, rid of "gender apartheid." Ultimately, if nothing is secure on where we stand on issues relating to gender, then all of the learned theories ceaselessly espoused by "experts," are but in vain.

So in this case, the Wodaabe men and women are exemplary in the fluid manner in which they have successfully managed to do away with the conundrum surrounding gender specificity. In marriage, for instance, the Wodaabe men must perform the feminine with such excellency, in order to seduce potential brides. The rule being that a Wodaabe bachelor must satisfactorily exhibit grace, elegance, and finely wrought beauty, before a bride can even consider him fit for a husband. For this rare exquisite man, the graceful and ceaseless performance of the feminine is the yoke of man's ideal nature, as opposed to that accepted brutish machismo cultivated here in the West, which is anachronistic; a veritable carcass of the Victorian sense of "man or woman."

Nonetheless, there are exceptional men/women in various parts of the world who have had the courage to perform the masculine/ feminine. Who is the one person that readily comes to mind? To be sure, only the great artist—Michael Jackson—who has with resilient grace collapsed the Great Wall of Gender. We almost hear Michael Jackson imploring his servants to "bring on the mascara and oh! the lipstick, eyeliner and don't forget that I'm a gentleman!" But of course, Michael has become an ideal hero because he has debunked the false notion of typical masculinity...plus like the "feminized" Wodaabe men, he's married.

Perhaps if Michael Jackson is appreciated enough in this part of the world, he will without doubt serve as a luxuriant laxative—making it possible for the masculinely constipated to ease themselves with a touch of femininity, however little. Forget the prevalent vulgar masculine attempt at femininity, such as men using bronzer, chapstick, etc. How tired! The new male, like the female, must adopt flexible gender signs that will abolish "Gender Apartheid." Ultimately, it's all good.



vaginal davis

interviewed by Tommy Gear and Mike Glass

Tell us about the origin myth of Vaginal Davis?

She emergeth from my mother's womb. The spirit of the woman we all know as Vaginal Davis was there from the very beginning—I came out of my mother's womb. . . raging.

When my strikingly beautiful divorcee mother was in her forties, I was born out of wedlock, as the youngest child with four sisters. My father was a handsome, young man in his twenties from an aristocratic Mexican family. They met at the Hollywood Palladium one night, and although she wanted a baby, my mother didn't necessarily want a husband. She was a modern woman. I'm writing a novel about her titled Mary Magdalene—which is her real name—an epic about a Black woman's life and struggles.

From my earliest remembrances, I was always putting on a show. Amidst all the ugliness of people whacked out on drugs and alcohol, I was trying to create something beautiful. I was a very unusual child. I had an innate love of gracious living. . . castles, music and art.

What was it like growing up in South Central Los Angeles?

I wasn't interested in the same things as people of my social class and background—I was into really grand things. I was always at the library—I lived at the library—because there I could have the glamour and the beauty. I would read myself from being poor, not having enough food to eat, not having any nice clothes to wear. I could be haute couture through books. I always felt like I was put in the wrong family—I should have been born into a rich family, not a poor one. I was a friendly child, but I was shy—I was always in my own world.

How did that affect the person you are today?

I've stayed centered in the knowledge of who I am. I have a strong sense of self. I'm very critical and moral. For example, I believe there are some people that are inherently evil and you should stay away from them. I'm very aware of my surroundings and people in general. People who cannot be trusted tend to avoid me—they can't look me in the eye. I'm like the oracle of Delphi—I sense people's energies, good and bad. And people who have agendas aren't too anxious to get close to someone they can't manipulate. My friends look to me as a barometer of people and situations.

You've created so many personas and characters as a performer.

Ever since I was a little child I have attracted attention—people were always looking at me, so I decided to give them something to look at. There are so many different levels—I'm a little bit schizophrenic obviously. We're all warped or messed up in some kind of way—it's what you do with it.

That's where the art comes in.

Exactly. I take my longings, my pain, my frustrations and put it into something constructive. Otherwise I'd be killing everybody, because I'm very angry. When the L.A. riots happened, I could have easily just gone on a rampage killing people because I have so much anger.

But you've found a good way to deal with it.

I wasn't interested in the same things as people of my social class and background, I was into really grand things. I was always at the library, I lived at the library, because there I could have the glamour and the beauty.

If it wasn't for my art and and my music I'd probably be in jail like all the other kids I grew up with—either dead or in jail. At least when you're in prison you get three meals a day—and lots of hot sex! But I have an outlet—can you imagine all the kids that came from my background that don't? People will find out about them when things erupt and, honey, they will erupt. The recent riot was just the tip of the iceberg of what's going to be—this system can't go on in the way that it's going. All the things that people hold so dear are going to come crashing down on them. None of us really knows what's going to happen, because we're all alienated from God. I just do my little sexy shenanigans—because I have to. It's so beyond me, being able to put a stop to it—I keep creating all these characters, my little movies, my bands, my writings, drawings, paintings—I just keep on because I have to do it.

What got you started?

In the inner city, there's a program for kids to go to the opera for free, and that was one of the things that really influenced me—The Magic Flute—that was the big kick. I was transfixed. I would put on shows with the neighborhood kids, turning someone's garage into a little theatre for staging my little performances, and charging ten cents to all the families in the area who would come by. When I moved out of South Central L.A., I met up with the emerging punk rock scene in Hollywood. Though I wasn't really a punk rocker—it all just converged when I realized that you could get on stage and do whatever you wanted—you didn't have to know how to sing or play an instrument. You just expressed things. When I first started it was just a kind of conceptual thing—dressed in some scruffy wig and outfit. I would just go stand someplace for hours and sing my crazy little songs. I met Andy Warhol once, and he said to me: "You're going to be big—despite yourself!"

How did you acquire the name Vaginal Davis?

It came from Angela Davis—I named myself as a salute to her because I was really into the whole late '60s and early '70s militant Black era. When you come from the inner city and you're Black, you go through a stage when you want to fit into the dominant culture, you kinda want to be White at first—it would be easier if you were White. Everything that's negrified or Black—you don't want to be associated with that. That's what I call my snow period—I just felt like if I had some cheap White boyfriend, my life would be perfect and I could be some treasured thing. I could feel myself as projected through some White person, and have all the privileges that White people get—validation through association.

Then there was a conscious shift, being that I was the first one in my family to go to college—I got ultra-militant. That's when I started reading about Angela and the Panthers, and that's when Vaginal emerged as a filtering of Angela through humor. That led to my early 1980s a capella performance entity, Vaginal Davis and the Afro Sisters (who were two White girls in afro wigs). We did a show called "We're Taking Over" where we portrayed the Sexualese Liberation Front which decides to kidnap all the heads of White corporate America so we could put big black dildos up their lily white buttholes and hold them for

(continued on page 77)



john

Interviewed by Jn. Ulrick Désert

Would you ever characterize your performance of female roles as an investigation of masculinity or femininity?

It is. When I do a female role I am investigating what it is to be a female, what it means to look like a female and what it's like to be treated by complete strangers as a female. When I do other pieces, I'm investigating different types of men. The men are not as interesting as the women, but what it boils down to, is me investigating my male and female sides with these characters I choose to portray. I also portray characters in the mid-

dle with dubious gender. Gender is very important to me because as an actor I like to give myself as many options as possible. Playing a woman is a challenge for me, its not that I want to be a woman, it's none of that. **How sensitive are you to female critics who might say: "Here once again a man defining a woman" in relation to your choice as an artist to occasionally portray different women?**

I don't have a problem with that. I don't think that by doing this occasionally it's an insult to woman. I'm sure some feminists hate the fact that I do this.



Photographed by Rick Gillette

kelly

but women can do it too. It's in the public domain, it's a thing to do, it depends what you do with it. Why not be able to impersonate the other. I don't live in drag. But when I do it I try to dignify it. I try to get people beyond the fact that I'm in drag and try to see me as this persona on stage and the idea of that persona. I've been around women all my life, they've been more interesting

es button in people. I would argue with a woman [critic] like that and take issue with her resenting me and censoring what I do or might do. **How do you go about the selecting your subjects, characters or themes?**

Usually it comes down to certain characters relating and being contingent to my experiences in life, such as death. I do just as many characters that I invent. But usually it has to tap into something in what's going on in the world, which is what I'm trying to make

I WANT TO BE A WOMAN by EVERT EDEN

I want to be a woman
 so I can be 20th Century Fox desirable
 flaunt my nipples in robes of lavender silk
 and run like a wind in the wind
 my legs snapping at the eyes of men like mad turtles
 I want to be a woman
 so I can be cruel and capricious
 play guitar with a man's feelings
 till he lip to my zip and I pluck him by the root
 like we the people pulling Lenin's statue
 from his pedestal -
 then I throw back my head and I laugh HAH HAH HAH
 I laugh like a flock of seagulls
 diving through the brass section
 of a symphony orchestra -
 I laugh with a dry-cleaned indifference
 off you go, honey
 go drop your lonesome yogurt
 on your knees

I want to be a woman
 so I can femme myself beyond fatale
 grow my nails as lonng as soda straws
 paint them the colors of electricity
 watch men talk to my tits and not to me
 and think to my self
 no nooky for you, silly boy

I want to be a woman
 so I can have hundreds of different penises
 instead of just one
 aah! all the handsome brutes I'll give myself to
 more freely than Catherine the Great
 gave herself to her army
 I'll throw them my hole
 damp like a Bible in a bikini
 I'll ride them
 like Van Gogh galloped canvas
 like Madonna dryhumps the nation
 we'll slurp and slither and slime for days
 sweating sweet sheets of satin to a swamp
 till my orgasms run into each other
 like traffic at a busy intersection in Rome

I want to be a woman
 so I can lecture men in bed
 lick gently, I'll say, suck easy
 it's a wet grape
 which you can never peel
 easy
 it's a living thing
 with more nerves than you have in your brain

I want to be a woman so I can be ugly and shy
 a face like a bug, a body like a beanbag
 three fucks a year, they are always drunk
 maybe a nice ugly man finds me
 we have children and love them

they look like shit
 we still love 'em

I want to be a woman
 so I can walk in fear
 and never forget
 that he, he and he
 carry a missile
 between their legs
 beat-seeking me

I want to be a
 woman so can I feel
 a cliterectomy
 rip my womanhood
 off and watch it dry
 like a shelled slug on a
 hot stone
 under the male gaze of a
 mindless sun

I want to be a woman so I can be fertile
 one egg taking on millions
 when the blood comes every month
 I'll poke that tampon in like a fat finger of fate
 and think of children
 who'll break me open like a pomegranate
 to make me the grower and keeper
 of bubble-blooded life
 the mother
 of dragon-storming queen-esteem daughters
 who'll rise from the dust and the ash and the dung
 to trash every testicle from Plato to Tarzan
 to smash Adam's Eden and God the Father's heaven

I want to be a woman so I can be a womb
 who senses a little heart under her heart
 a kick of life that knocks inside:
 hi, here I am, I'm you, you're me
 and buds into a smile that sucks
 life from my life, smiles from my smile

I want to be a woman
 so I can understand why
 I am such a goddamn ... guy
 heavymetal hardline
 hangtough hotstud
 take-no-prisoners fresh blood
 hey bitch
 lemme bang your sugarditch
 suck my rockcock
 brickdick
 meanest penis
 Steely Dannnnnnnnnnnn

I want to be a woman
 so I won't have to
 BE-A-MAN

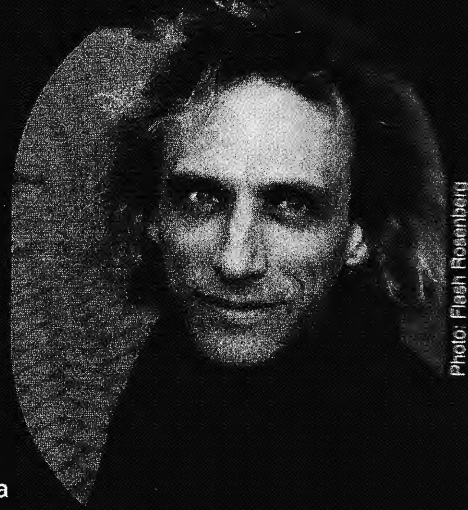


Photo: Fleah Rosenber

Mirabai sings: Are not all souls female before God?
 Certainly I approach this mirauding One with
 soul open - legs spread, if you will -
 tho I am invariably plundered by quixotic
 impostors, the fervid consorts of lies - fool to
 myriad indictable infidelities.
 But how is one to sift thru this sultry sea of
 outriders? Heaven has ne'er been disposed to
 abject sanctimonies;
 thru this life and others I have been a
 monger - but it all desire not born of the
 same woeful womb?
 What is my bed but the improvident tomb of
 amalgam tried by fire?
 And when my tempestuous envoys no longer sail to
 affront my coasts, where becomes the trysting
 place of diminished desires,
 What deity resides there, hot, raven and
 horny to steal the wearied spirits of
 sailors without ship?
 For all my ferocious epithets, thru all these
 censurable imperatives, has not my virginity
 hymen unbroken, to be penetrated again and
 again and again, inviolate from cant sins, this
 lone sadhu-in-want-of-a-god, my soul ever
 naked, innocent, elucidating the passions of
 place and time, yearning the intrusion of the
 Dark One of Mirabai -
 lost in the fragrance of these lustful
 ablutions;
 ever fecund with the seed of
 dissolution:
 My God, I am your whore!



Photo: Steven Arnold

by **Gavin Geoffrey Dillard**

Gender

compiled by

Tommy Gear, Antoine Tempé,

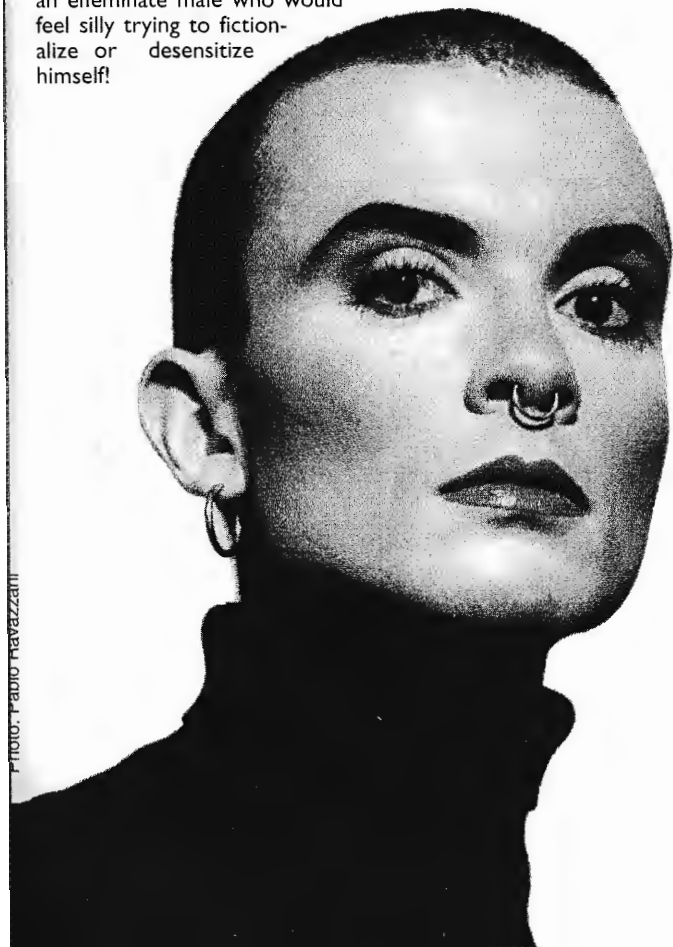
Shingo Wakagi, and Steve Wilson

Millie Wilson (artist): What is gender anyway? It leaves out a huge category: sexual preference. It's more interesting to think of ways in which to imagine practices and identities that slide along various axes that don't get labeled in quite that way. If gender is something else--fine. In other words, you are either considered masculine or feminine--you are either a girl in boy drag or a boy in girl drag. But there are these different subtleties and nuances and possibilities and things that are unfixed in there. I'm more interested in ways of being that don't have to be prescribed, in exploring different positions, in not assuming for example that masculinity belongs to men or that femininity belongs to women. I'm interested in passing, and I'm also interested in letting the artifice really be out there too. Gender has been fucked with--I don't really think about it that much.



Photo: Ross Bennett Lewis,

Rohan Quine (writer): I'm happy as a boy but I never found it natural, easy or interesting to follow all those rigid codes of attitude, dress, emotion, movement, speech and "invulnerability" which seem to be expected of males. I'm not a transsexual or a drag queen, just an effeminate male who would feel silly trying to fictionalize or desensitize himself!



: Lyle Ashton Harris

is...

Joseph Lee:(artist): It is time to free myself from the "waspy" gyrations of western culture. The activity was brought here via Europe and unfortunately produces the canon of Phillippe Rushton. So ingrained in the American psyche is the "desexualized" Asian male. The "egg-headed wimp," PLEASE!!! I have found pleasure; pleasure that is empirical! pleasure of existence in my own skin. pleasure fit for a king.



photo: Jennifer Kozioł

Paul Alexander (DJ, singer, performer): I prefer to remove myself from gender division; and this allows me to exist in both feminine and masculine world.

Uji: Iké Udé, photographed by Pablo Ravazzani



Hamlet Manzueta a.k.a. Dolores (artist/TV host): My gender issue is about an energy that is there and I just play with it. I am not afraid to explore the "chic" in me. I wouldn't give up my dick for the world. I love being a man.

Photo: Bill Emrich



Roderick Leverne: I am interested in those spaces where the masculine and feminine, male and female merge in one body. My aesthetic performance is only drag to the extent that all aesthetic performance of identity is costuming. Gender performance is about breaking down categories, boundaries, binaries. By inhabiting the spaces of both the masculine and the feminine, I feel I can obliterate the need for those categories.



Photo: Ike Udé

Reginald Lamar: I have always wanted my male body to reinvent masculinity not as its gendered opposite but as one othered, a hybrid. I am not a drag queen: nor am I a gender bender. Gender fuck comes closest... I am a work forever in progress. I am yet to be named.

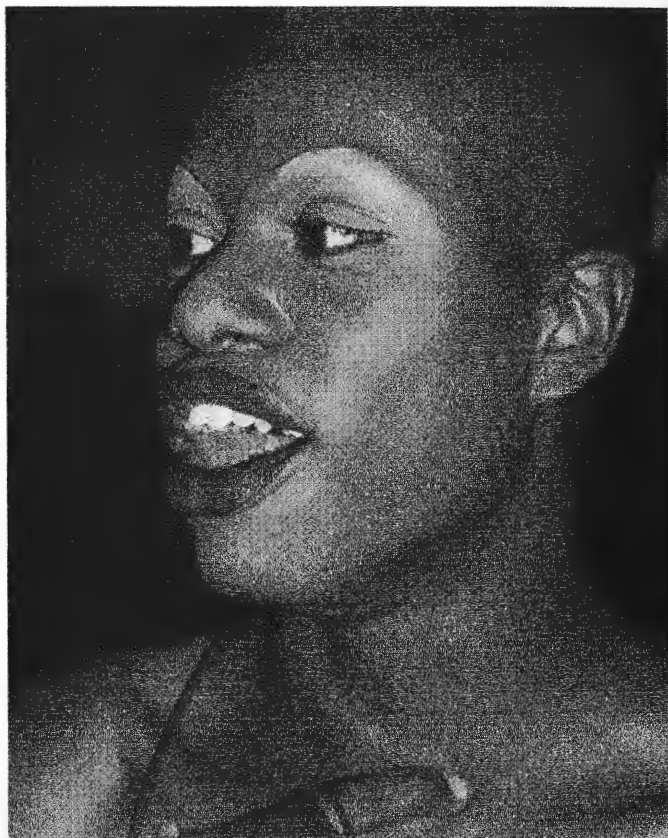


Photo: Ike Udé



Photo: Shingo Wakasgi

Hideomi Goto (Performer in KASAGIES): I say it's nonsense to distinguish man and woman today. I wear like woman because it's a fashion statement to me. I feel like I am a different person by wearing women's clothes.



Photo: Vivien Bittencourt

Tabboo! (performer): You see, for me, to do drag, it's natural, right/ Hello.

Gender Is...

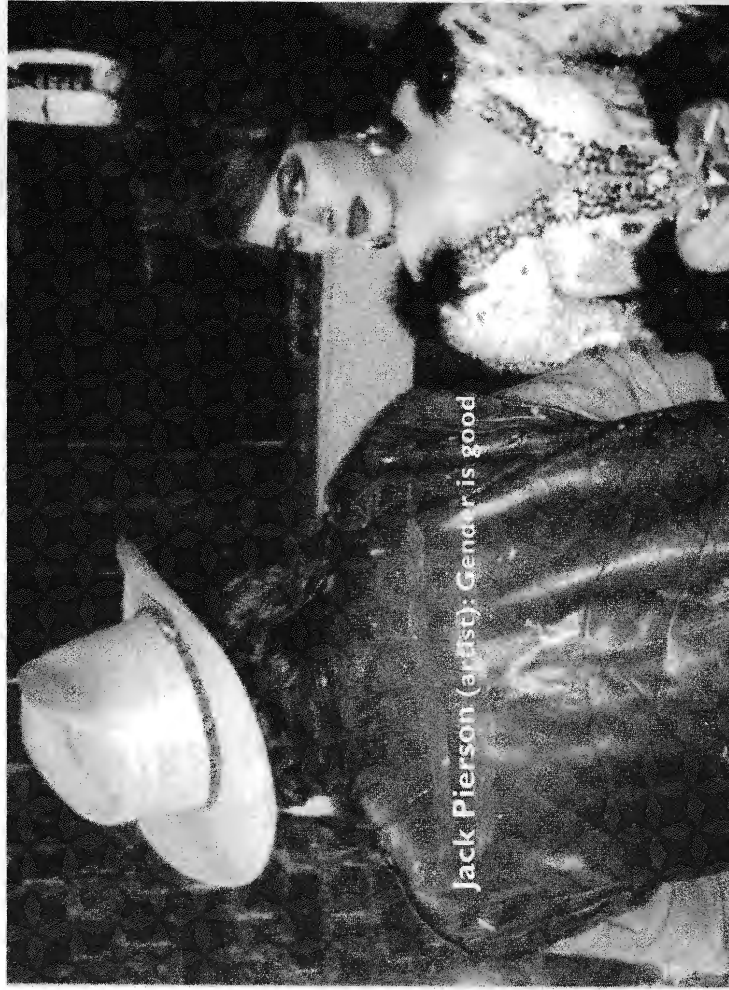
Izumi Kasai (artist): I feel that I become a woman when I put my bra on. I feel as a woman feels, when my man takes off all my heavy armor: and kisses all of my sensitive parts.



Sayoko Amano (Actress): I love to control men. Since I am a woman, I have to be attracted by men and I have them in my hand.



Photo: Shingo Wakasugi



Jack Pierson (artist): Gender is good

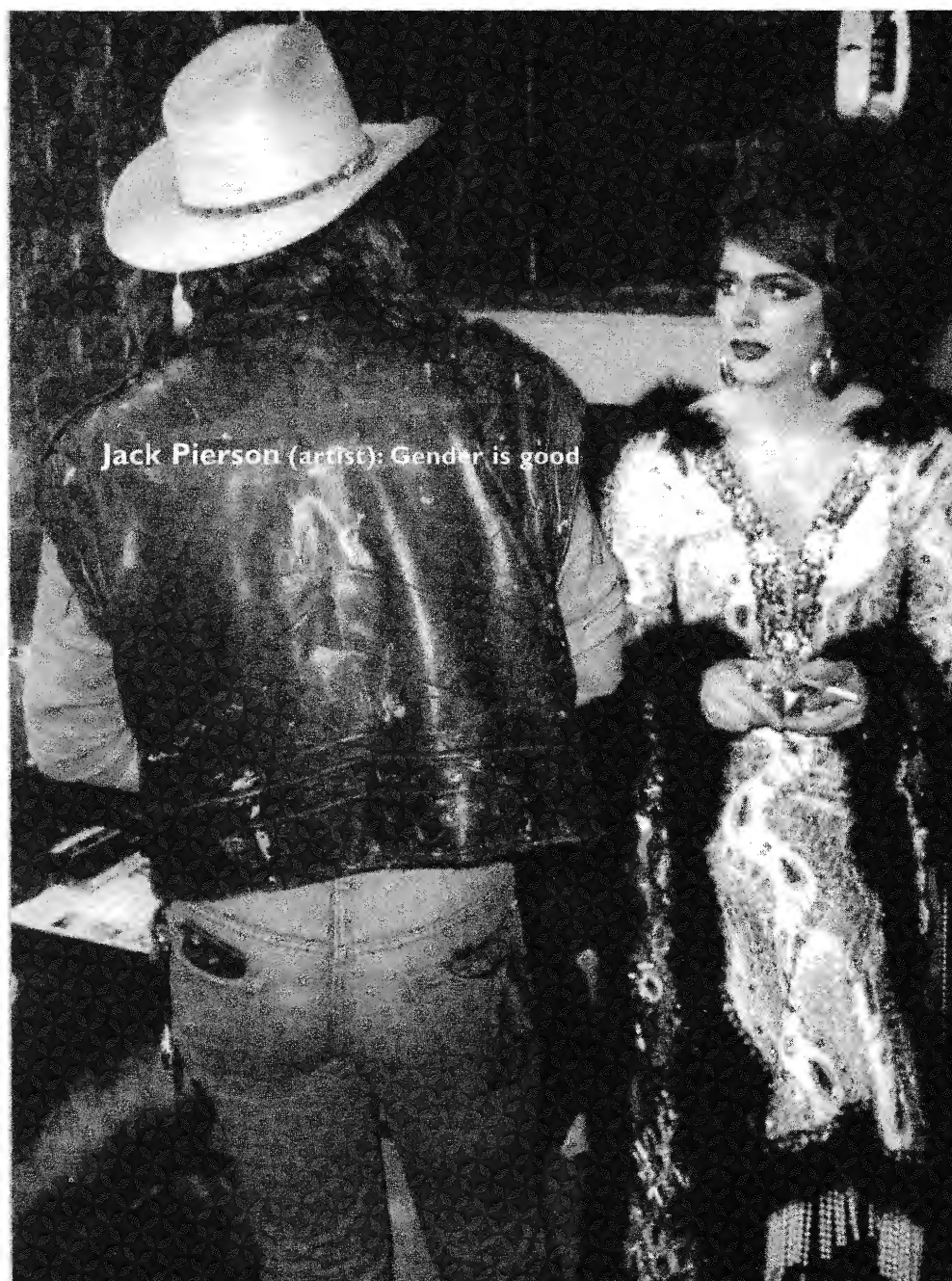
zumi Kasai (artist): I feel that I become a roman when I put my bra on. I feel as a women feels, when my man takes off all my heavy armor: and kisses all of my sensitive parts.



Sayoko Amano (Actress): I love to control men. Since I am a woman, I have to be attracted by men and I have them in my hand.



Photo: Shingo Wakasgi



Jack Pierson (artist): Gender is good

Phillipa Garnar: As an artist and humorist with a penchant for technological satire, I've "reinvented" mass-produced artifacts to create items of tempting appeal but dubious value, as in my books: *The Better Living Catalog* and *Utopia or Bust*. Recently I became a product of my own juxtaposeurial tendencies by undergoing sex-change surgery. After a half-century as a competent hetro male, I committed gendercide and was reissued as "man maid" post-menopausal/adolescent female. I have realized my ultimate art goal: to "be" one of my own ideas. I feel like my brain is the remote controller for an animated toy (my body) and it can't wait to try her out in each new situation.



Tarek Aylouch: Masculinity is tired. Femininity is tired



Manuela Carrasquillo (cab driver): In general, I am fine. But I have lots of problems with Pakistan and Indian male cab drivers. For example, on a few occasions, they've disrespected me at the garage where all drivers go to pick up their cabs. This man told me: "You woman, back off! Why don't you go home and cook?" As for the passengers, they are very nice to me and often ask for my telephone number or a date.

Gender Is...



Shinji Yamazaki (Photographer): My desire is to go back to the womb.



Kris Kim: It's still prized, that whole machismo thing, between men.



Betsy Beier: I used to fantasize about sex, now I fantasize about gender.



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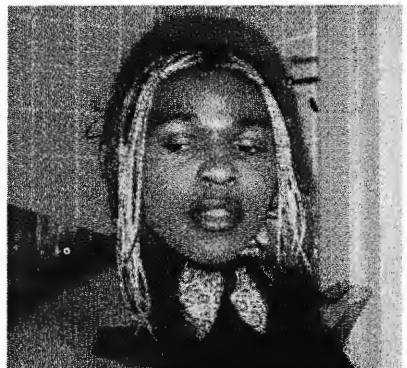
Jason Mount: Personally I believe that the women's movement has emasculated men to the point that men are becoming women.



Cris Beam: Gender is never neutral. It's constantly being invented and changed from within.



Sonya Popp: Androgyny was a big part of my childhood. My heroes were Annie Lenox, Prince, Boy George, Michael Jackson.



Krylon: I think that I'm just alive and having sex with what/whoever I feel like. I think if we went back to Greek times things would be a lot more relaxed. Except for the pedophilia.



Mickey Boardman: When gender crosses the boundaries is when it's most exciting. It's like socialism and communism, they're opposite ends of the spectrum but they're exactly alike.



Junichi Kawamoto(Actor): Men and women are totally different. I respect women but I'm happy to be a man.