ABSTRACT

FOUR NARRATIVES OF CROSS-DRESSING IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART: MARCEL DUCHAMP, CLAUDE CAHUN, ELEANOR ANTIN, AND DIANE TORR

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This essay looks at cross-dressing as a trope in fine art across the twentieth century. The respective contemporaneous discourse that was taking place informed artists Marcel Duchamp, Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, and Diane Torr's art practice. These separate artistic engagements are referred to as narratives. Duchamp was engaged with the Victorian era’s notion of allegorical alchemy, which was widely accepted as an artistic endeavor by many modern artists, and its connection to the androgyne. Cahun was engaged in the medical models of homosexuality, which was synonymous with cross-dressing during the early part of the twentieth century, and consistently interrogated and disrupted unquestioned and rigid gender roles as well as any system that echoed such regulatory and binary zeal. Eleanor Antin's engagement with cross-dressing involved depictions of powerlessness and the figure of the loser during the Vietnam War era. Finally, Diane Torr used cross-dressing to question the notion that gender was essential. Though these four artists engaged in cross-dressing, they had diverse objectives. By generating a blurred gender, they introduced crisis, which positioned them outside of constructed systems of identity and society. Cross-dressing can be understood as a concept that supports disruption, intervention and refusal. It positions fluidity against any rigid binary systems, transcending conversations on gender.
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INTRODUCTION

When investigating cross-dressing in twentieth-century Western art, one must be aware of the numerous and distinct contexts that informed this particular practice. One must also consider the many ways in which cultural mores have shifted over time and locate the institutions that produced and disseminated these theories of this gender-bending sartorial practice. This essay identifies three major shifts in the prevailing attitude toward cross-dressing; from these shifts, four distinct narratives will be analyzed. The first and second of these narratives were a response to theories generated in the nineteenth century. Medical models of homosexuality, then inextricably linked with cross-dressing, as well as narratives of alchemy as metaphor, were both linked to theories produced in the Victorian era. In the time between the first two narratives and the third, the first Kinsey report, published in 1948, radically restructured the prevalent concept of cross-dressing that society held by splitting the figure of the cross-dresser and the homosexual into two distinct types. This influenced how cross-dressing was viewed. The report’s findings emancipated the figure of the cross-dresser and altered its connotations so that it was no longer perceived as a visual stand-in for homosexuality. The third narrative coincided with feminist art and performance art in the 1970’s. The fourth responded to the theories proposed in the discipline of gender studies in the 1990’s that emerged from postmodern and poststructuralist theory. This project looks at four pioneering artists whose cross-dressing practice spans the long century:
Marcel Duchamp, Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, and Diane Torr. These artists made conceptual leaps by exploring the theme of cross-dressing. They also expanded the parameters of the artistic discourse of cross-dressing by defiantly, yet playfully, challenging the contemporaneous established views on gender roles and by extension any concept that was assumed to exist on a binary. By invoking the transvestite and by questioning gender as a fixed category they challenged society itself.

In the 1920s Marcel Duchamp embodied alchemical and shamanic transformation through his own cross-dressing as Rrose Sélavy. Claude Cahun re-imagined traditional female archetypes in her text work, and defiantly interrogated and rejected prescribed gender roles through her writing and her photographic self-portraits. In the 1970s, Eleanor Antin performed the King of Solana Beach, cross-dressed as one of her many “Selves.” She performed as a deposed king, an embodiment of the Loser, a figure that signified feelings of political powerlessness during the Vietnam War as well as attitudes of second wave feminism, which was also unfolding at that time. Diane Torr’s gender investigations through performance span thirty years, which began in the mid-1970s when she questioned the position of feminists toward the sex industry. By the 1990s Torr’s Drag King workshops in New York had turned toward an exploration of the non-essential qualities of masculinity, making Torr a particularly fascinating subject of study when analyzing shifting attitudes towards gender at the end of the twentieth century.

Although these four artists emerged from diverse cultural contexts, they each engaged with cross-dressing as a provocative, confrontational, and consequently a subversive act. By inhabiting a place of visual gender ambivalence, one allows for
fluidity. Art practice that dealt with this theme confronted and interrogated not only designated binary gender roles, but also any contemporaneous conventional mores, methods, traditions, institutions or organizations. By suggesting that identity, and by extension any established rigid system, is in flux, rather than a fixed site, and that its apparent inescapability should be questioned, their work formed a space for further dialogue, disrupting the social norms of their respective times.

**Method and Framework**

The case-studies in this essay were selected to represent four distinct approaches to cross-dressing. These approaches are referred to as narratives. Though many artists engaged cross-dressing over the course of the twentieth century, Duchamp, Cahun, Antin, and Torr each represent paradigmatic shifts in thinking about cross-dressing as trope and medium. Their work stands out not only because the artists responded to changes in attitudes toward cross-dressing with great sensitivity and aptitude, but more significantly because their interventions played a part in shaping those attitudes. These distinctive approaches used to undertake the trope of the transvestite, the androgyne, the impersonator and the drag king shaped these diverse narratives of cross-dressing. Social and political discourse is represented on the clothed surfaces of the artists’ bodies and the protean qualities of cross-dressing can be charted.

The method of inquiry for this essay will be informed by a trans-disciplinary approach. As the prefix “trans” suggests, trans-disciplinarity concerns that which is as Basarab Nicolescu wrote, “at once between the disciplines, across the different
disciplines and beyond each individual discipline.”¹ It is a research strategy that crosses many disciplinary boundaries to construct a holistic approach. This essay draws upon disciplines outside of art history to establish the social context that surrounded each artist. Specifically, it draws upon cultural studies, gender studies, queer studies, and nineteenth-century narratives of alchemy, as well as performance studies. These disciplines will be used to construct this broader, multi-faceted trans-disciplinary framework in order to gain temporal perspective and contextual clarity as well as to reveal changing historiographies of cross-dressing. It is important to be aware of how cross-dressing has been perceived and interpreted over time in various societies, though this study will focus just on Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By locating and tracing the wide-ranging articulations and interpretations of cross-dressing, even in this relatively focused context, we will better understand the cultural climate from which each artist emerged, as well as his or her interventions.

Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough’s 1993 study, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender, spans history from antiquity to the late twentieth century and researches cross-dressing throughout history exhaustively.² Of particular interest for this project is their research on early sexologists’ work and discussion of the role of Freudian psychoanalysis, when trying to understand cross-dressing in the first half of the twentieth century. Sociologist Bonnie Bullough and historian and sexologist Vern Bullough have


compiled and described how the history of cross-dressing and homosexuality were intertwined. They further discuss Freud’s absence in this discourse; as he had never really written about cross-dressers, or as the medical community referred to them, transvestites. Psychoanalysts who antecedent him shaped their own diagnoses based on his writing on fetishism. Bullough and Bullough reveal the details of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century medical models and how they formed and dominated public opinion on cross-dressing before the controversial Kinsey Reports, researched by sexologist Alfred Kinsey, were published in 1948 and 1953. Moe Meyer examines the consequences the first Kinsey report had in the United States. This will be described promptly.

Marjorie Garber’s influential 1997 book, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, explores the cultural significance of the transvestite, asserting that through history cross-dressing has created culture as much as culture has given rise to cross-dressing.³ She shows how the transvestite and the activity of cross-dressing disrupt and call attention to cultural social and aesthetic dissonances. She posits that cross-dressing challenges the very notion of the “original” and of stable identity; the author radically re-reads transvestite characters in literature and cinema. She points out the transvestite’s invisibility in critical discourse and then approaches the transvestite as a theoretical intervention that doesn’t need to be taxonomized depending on whether the original subject is male or female and she rejects the notion that the transvestite is a masquerade. This is necessary if one’s goal is to create a narrative, which doesn’t dwell on older historical separations that depend on the sex of the artist.

In his 2010 book, *An Archaeology of Posing: Essays on Camp, Drag, and Sexuality*, Moe Meyer analyzes the definition of camp through performance studies and interpretive anthropology which, he states, makes his analysis more robust than other studies based on purely theoretical constructs. The author traces the proliferation of the “the medical model of homosexuality,” a scientific discourse that created the official stage for researching “the homosexual” and constructed a narrative for identification which is quite different from the inscriptions of the mid to late twentieth century that were used. He presents the origins of the term “camp” and insists on the term being used to define the production of gay social visibility. He identifies the shift in attitude toward gender that took place in 1948 when Alfred Kinsey’s work brought a new understanding of the prevalence of homosexuality. The first Kinsey Report marked a transformational moment in how American society understood homosexuality. Meyer’s perspective, drawn from queer theory, helps the reader better understand how radical Duchamp’s cross-dressing was in the context of the definition of camp in the early part of the twentieth century.

Judith Jack Halberstam’s 1998 work *Female Masculinity* leads the reader through the history and legal shifts of cross-dressing and specifically how it implicated women. Halberstam addresses the advent of the “lesbian” as a term and a concept, as well as the rise of Drag King culture, at the end of the twentieth century. Halberstam’s theories are largely informed by Judith Butler’s 1990 *Gender Trouble*, which is considered to be one

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of the most influential texts in the field of gender studies. Butler questions the very terms society uses to describe itself. She interrogates the meanings of terms such as masculine and feminine, sex and gender. She posits that they are linguistic social constructs that enforce established power dynamics and thus are perpetuated as learned behavior from a very young age, depending on the biological sex of one, to maintain the status quo. The author also introduces the key concept of performativity. Butler also addresses the topic of Drag queens and how this act of cross-dressing can be processed through the theory of performativity.

Alchemy and its connection to the concept of the androgyne interested many intellectuals and artists in the early part of the twentieth century, including Duchamp. Alexander Roob’s 2001 study *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* provides a historical overview of the origins of alchemy. The first section of this essay will attempt to describe the history of alchemy, the narratives of alchemy, alchemical ideas of transformation and Duchamp’s connection to these concepts. Roob states that in alchemy, arcane knowledge could be selectively transmitted through imagery rather than language. The outcome of alchemical practice, according to the Victorian narrative of alchemy, was the alchemical androgyne, also referred to as the Rebis, an androgynous being created by the fusion of a male and female figure. This transfiguration and melding represented a spiritual gold, alchemy’s highest achievement. As Lawrence M. Principe demonstrates

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in his 2011 article, “Alchemy Restored,” alchemy has been systematically written out of the history of science even though until the early 1700s alchemy and chemistry was understood to be the same discipline. Though alchemy was rejected and shunned completely in scientific circles by the nineteenth century, Principe points out that its’ theories were preserved in secret societies and later appeared as occultist practice in Victorian times. Today, however, many have come to reconsider alchemical principles as relevant to science as well.

In her book, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts (1980)* Wendy Doniger, a scholar of the history of religions describes shamanic transformations and their connection to the androgyne, a concept not to be confused with androgyny, in culture. Duchamp’s cross-dressing was engaged with the androgyne; this will be further discussed in Chapter One. Though cross-dressing in antiquity emerged from a different cultural context than did the activities of Duchamp, Cahun, Antin, and Torr, it is illuminating to see the longer historical trajectory of these ideas. Caroline Cros’s 2013 book, *Marcel Duchamp*, is likewise important for explaining the artist’s concept of the “infra thin” by giving us access into Duchamp’s circle of friends, including Francis Picabia and Man Ray, who shared a common interest in alchemy, shamanism, and the concept of the fourth dimension. Lanier Graham’s 2003 study, *Duchamp and Androgyny*:

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Art, Gender, and Metaphysics, traces Duchamp’s interest in androgyny and alchemy and how this was connected to other contemporaneous artists.\footnote{11}{Lanier Graham, Duchamp and Androgyny: Art, Gender, and Metaphysics (Berkeley: No-Thing Press) p. 17.}

In her 1999 essay, “Inverted Odysseys,” Shelley Rice posited that the need to experiment with identity and the self is central to a global culture, and not simply an isolated psychological or a feminist issue. The essay contributed to Rice’s edited volume of the same name, which accompanied an exhibit of the work of Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Cindy Sherman at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery.\footnote{12}{Shelley Rice, ed., Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman (exh. cat. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).}

In this exhibition, Claude Cahun’s “Heroines,” a series of fifteen monologues addressing feminine archetypes, written in the first person, was featured in its entirety for the first time. This is also the first instance where this text had been translated in English. Don’t Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, edited by Louise Downie in 2006, is a collection of essays that investigates Cahun’s work and her life, including her political leanings and activism, her connection to the Surrealists and Breton, her involvement with experimental theatre and her self-portraits.\footnote{13}{Louise Downie, Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore (London: Tate Publishing, 2006).}

Even her resistance against the Nazi occupation, later in life, can be linked to her life-long engagement with her persistent commitment to identity ambiguity and celebrating the refusal of established power dynamics.
Emily Liebert interviewed Eleanor Antin for the 2013 exhibition, “Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin’s “Selves,” which she curated at Columbia University’s Wallach Art Gallery. The interview explores the artist’s twenty-year engagement with multiple alter egos.\textsuperscript{14} The work that this essay will be focusing on, \textit{The King of Solana Beach}, took place in the 1970’s and the link between it and the Vietnam War will be highlighted and analyzed. The catalogue that accompanied the eponymous exhibit includes a collection of essays that mostly focus on Antin’s most controversial “self,” a black ballerina, in her work, \textit{Becoming Antinova}. Cherise Smith places Antin’s work in the context of 1970s feminism in her 2011 book, \textit{Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith}.\textsuperscript{15} Antin’s subversive \textit{Being Antinova}, Smith demonstrates, was controversial at a time when essentialist theories of femininity were widely accepted.

In their 2010 collaboration, \textit{Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance}, performance artist Diane Torr, and Drama and Theatre studies professor Stephen Bottoms discuss gender performance from their respective positions of expertise: Torr, as an artist who has been engaged with gender investigations in her art practice for thirty years in the New York art scene (starting in 1976) and Bottoms, as a leading performance critic who contextualizes these acts in the backdrop of the 1970’s all the

\textsuperscript{14} Huey Copeland, Emily Liebert, Eleanor Antin, and Deborah Cullen, \textit{Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin’s “Selves”} (exh. cat. New York, Columbia University, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 2014).

way to the 1990’s, adding to our understanding of the cultural atmosphere of these times.16

Duchamp’s interest and involvement in alchemy has been acknowledged by scholars, such as Graham, Bradley and Moffitt. Graham is most interested in androgyny as a modernist trope and though he quotes Duchamp as admitting that his work is alchemical, he doesn’t connect the artist’s cross-dressed alter-ego with alchemy.17 Moffitt closely examines the Victorian narratives of alchemy and how they influenced poets and artists who identified themselves as alchemists. He then positions Duchamp’s art practice within these contemporaneous notions, yet he doesn’t make any connections to Rrose Sélavy as a component of this alchemical engagement.18 Bailey utilizes Jungian theories of alchemy not only to map out Duchamp’s work but to characterize the artist’s conduct and daily life as well. Bradley posits that alchemy was an enduring practice for Duchamp.19 Jung wrote on alchemy in the 1960’s so though his system is very briefly employed to discuss alchemy and its organization, Duchamp certainly could not have been informed by it.20 Molderings discusses Duchamp’s interest in the aesthetics of


chance. This interest might have emerged from his interest in specific non-Euclidian theories. Accompanied with popular theories on the fourth dimension, as understood in a pre-Einsteinian period where the fourth dimension was not considered to be time, Duchamp engaged in the arbitrary nature of systems in his work.

This essay posits, by contrast, that Duchamp’s interest in alchemy and androgyny was inextricable. Though Jung’s theories on alchemy allow for the most clear and comprehensive understanding of its symbols and practice, his psychoanalytic interpretations may not be necessarily applicable to Duchamp’s engagement to alchemy.

Duchamp was influenced by a specifically allegorical Victorian narrative of alchemy which he employed as an arbitrary system to create art work, in which he cited its components through different works. This included his cross-dressing. In addition, by investigating the medical model of homosexuality, this paper attempts to tie Duchamp’s cross-dressing with the act of camping. While other contemporaneous artists might have been interested in androgyny, Duchamp radically changed the way modern art interacted with it by irreverently embodying the sacred symbol of the alchemical androgyne as a bawdy libertine transvestite.

Antin’s king figure has not been written about extensively. In the essays written in the exhibit catalogue for *Multiple Occupancy* not even one full paragraph can be found discussing her female-to-male cross-dressing. It seems that he is only mentioned vey briefly as one of Antin’s many selves. Smith is predominantly concerned with Antin’s

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black ballerina performance. In fact, *Being Antinova* is the most controversial “self” and has the most scholarship connected to it, with the *King of Solana Beach* continuously being mentioned only to show the range of Antin’s selves. Perhaps Antin’s gender bending hasn’t received the scholarly attention it deserves because her performance initially might appear to be comical, harmless and lacking critical potency. The artist’s comical approach shouldn’t be underestimated; the *King of Solana Beach* produced a complex and multi-layered critique that investigated power relations through cross-dressing to discuss concepts broader than gender identity such as social class, powerlessness, imperialism and war. There is a serious gap in the literature and this essay aims to rectify this oversight by taking it seriously and approaching it critically.

Diane Torr’s work has yet to be recognized as widely central to art that was taking place in the late twentieth century. Bottoms work analyzes her performance work and situates Torr’s work while weaving in the social resistance that she was met with by feminists. Halberstam writes that Torr’s work cannot be simply understood as drag king performance because it lacks the theatrical elements that the author believes are required for one to refer to a performance as drag. Yet, Torr is acknowledged my formative figures in the female-to-male drag scene as an ambassador of drag. By adding Butler’s theories on gender, this essay hopes to establish Torr as an intellectual who put forth concepts of performativity in physical motion.

Though these four artists engaged in cross-dressing, they each had different concerns and objectives. They each employed cross-dressing’s power to generate a blurred gender. Its effectiveness rests within this very ambiguity, not in any clear-cut
gendered identity. Garber discusses the concept of the *third* as something that questions the binary and introduces crisis. She insists that the third is not a sex; rather it is “a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.”\(^\text{22}\) The example Garber gives is the third world to describe this concept of thirdness. It was so named to position it outside of the constructed regions of the first world, the developed West, and the second world, which described the Communist bloc. The only way these disconnected regions of the planet called the third world can be said to be cohesive is to point to their similarities, such as their post-colonial status, poverty, tropical climate and non-Caucasian population. Yet this third reconfigures the relational status between the original pair and questions identities that were assumed to be unchallengeable. This essay points to cross-dressing as a medium that has been employed to interrogate the status quo and reject any notions presumed to be “known.”

\(^{22}\) Garber, *Vested Interests*, p. 11
CHAPTER 1

MARCEL DUCHAMP: ALCHEMY AND CAMP

The first work engaged in cross-dressing that this essay will examine is the infamous *Rrose Sélavy* by Man Ray (1921). Duchamp’s alter ego has been written about more extensively than those of other artists featured in this essay combined, and has been the source of many conflicting analyses. This essay will limit its investigation and concentrate on Duchamp’s connections to alchemy as well as contemporaneous cross-dressing theories as arranged by the medical establishment. Though this paper primarily focuses on female to male cross-dressing narratives, Marcel Duchamp’s alter ego produced a cult-like influence among male artists through the twentieth century and must be recognized as one of the major narratives of cross-dressing in the twentieth century. Whether by referencing Sélavy in their work or simply by gender impersonating, these male-to-female performances find contextual academic and institutional validation through Duchamp. Examples of this influence include Andy Warhol’s collaboration with photographer Christopher Makos, and their 1961 photographic series, *Altered Image*, as well as Yasumasa Morimura’s 1988 portrait *Doublonmage (Marcel)*. Duchamp established an artistic convention that male artists have had the option to partake and engage in. Any analysis of their work can be thus positioned within the art history of Duchampian cross-dressing. Duchamp’s cross-dressing act provided the visual means to represent the end product of alchemical practice. This transformation, where one would
transmute into the Androgyne, also known as the Rebis, was a state achieved when the practitioner of alchemy reached an allegorical transcendence. The physical manifestation of this transcendent occurrence was depicted as an entity that had both masculine and feminine characteristics. This imagery could be found in alchemic texts, and one can observe it in other shamanistic traditions as well. One might even say that Rrose Sélavy has been approached as a ready-made by male artists, or at least as visual shorthand for specific subject matter and investigations established by Duchamp. This sartorial séance conjured concepts exclusive to male to female cross-dressing. When women artists have engaged with cross-dressing, by contrast, their work is often received quite differently, not so much as connected to androgyny as metaphysical transformation, but as a political mission that questions and rejects established notions of power that favor the masculine sex in relation to the feminine one, and a refusal of fixed gender roles. This chapter will focus on a few specific concepts: Duchamp’s interest in the Victorian narrative of alchemy and the Rebis, how this act can be linked to shamanism, how he disrupted bourgeois norms by “camping,” (according to the contemporaneous usage of the word “camp”) and his pursuit for inhabiting his notion of the “infra-thin.” Additionally, a brief presentation of how the medical models of homosexuality viewed cross-dressing as synonymous to homosexuality will be addressed.

_Nineteenth-Century Interpretations of Cross-Dressing_

The first person to research and focus on homosexuality, a term coined by Hungarian journalist Károly Mária Benkert in 1869, was Karl Heinrich Ulrich (1825-95),
an activist lawyer for homosexual rights in Germany. Ulrich is cited as being the first self-proclaimed homosexual. In his first work, Vindex, a leaflet published in 1864 under the pseudonym Numa Numantius, Ulrich presented his theory of Uranian (lesbian and gay) love, a term he created to describe homosexuality. He also proposed the existence of a third sex, where the soul of a woman is trapped in the body of a man, creating the terminology and concept of the “Urning” and conversely the “Dioning”, the latter term referring to heterosexual individuals. British physician Havelock Ellis described how these concepts were inspired by Plato’s Symposium in which Pausanias recounts the creation myth of Aphrodite Urania who was created only from Uranos’ testicles.

Ulrich’s work is considered to be the first that exposed the concept of homosexuality to the medical community. But it is the physician, Carl Westphal (1833-90) who positioned the study of stigmatized sexual behavior on to a scientific dialectic. In his 1869 article Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten he addressed two cases of cross-dressing and branded these actions with his term “contrary sexual feeling”.

Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s (1840-1902) Psychopathia Sexualis, printed in 1887, was the most widely read treatise on sexuality before the Kinsey Reports. His theories were widely accepted by the public and

23 Moe Meyer, An Archaeology of Posing (La Vergne: Macater Press, 2010), 55.
24 Bonnie Bullough and Vern Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender (Philadelphia: University of Press), 204.
26 Ibid.
27 Bullough and Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender, pp. 204.
established the attitudes toward cross-dressing, which at the time were synonymous with homosexuality, that were held by many until the 1960s. Krafft-Ebing believed that this practice was a display of degeneracy and that these perversions must be stopped. He believed that the cross-dresser was tainted or defective, given to base animal instincts, and of a corrupt nature. He posited that the only way to escape such moral decay was to focus on a virtuous life through morality, will power, and strong character.28

German physician Magnus Hirschfield (1868-1935) was a self-avowed homosexual and a law reformer.29 He founded the first Institute of Sexual Science and had an immense library with more than 20,000 volumes and 35,000 pictures accompanied by thousand of sex questionnaires filled out by subjects. This massive wealth of information was later destroyed by the Nazis.30 He invented the term “transvestite” to differentiate the phenomenon of wearing the other gender’s clothes from other sexual behaviors. In 1910 he published The Transvestites: An Investigation of the Erotic Drive to Cross Dressers, a work that authors Bullough and Bullough consider still to be the key work on cross-dressing, because he created the largest database of studies until that time, seventeen cases.31

British physician and writer Havelock Ellis is often cited as one of the most influential sex researchers at the turn of the twentieth century (artist Claude Cahun would later translate Ellis’ work into French.) In his 1896 treatise, Sexual Inversion, later

28 Bullough and Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender, pp. 204-207.
29 Bullough and Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender, p. 207.
30 Garber, Vested Interests, pp. 55.
31 Bullough and Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender, pp. 207-208.
published as the second volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1900-1928), Ellis noted that no studies had ever used subjects that existed outside of the asylum or prison system, until his first cases were published.\(^{32}\) He was concerned with Hirschfield’s term “transvestism” because he felt that it narrowed the focus of any investigation to garments and oversimplified it. In 1913 he published his first paper on the topic. The term he initially used in the paper for cross dressing was the term “inversion.” Later Ellis coined the term “Eonism,” which was inspired by the eighteenth-century cross-dresser, the Chevalier d’Eon. Ellis didn’t consider Eonism troublesome; his focus was scientific. Consequently, he made no proposals to change individuals’ behavior. Others however had therapeutic rather than research oriented goals.\(^{33}\)

Though the father of psychoanalysis, Austrian Sigmund Freud never specifically studied cross-dressing, he did pathologize the phenomenon of men wearing certain articles of women’s clothing in his 1927 essay, “Fetishism.”\(^{34}\) As a result psychoanalysts employed Freud’s theories of fetishism in an attempt to “cure” the cross dresser.\(^{35}\) Freud believed that men have perversions and women have neuroses. Perversions have to do with having something, he posited, while neuroses came about from lacking something.\(^{36}\)


\(^{33}\) Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, pp. 213.


\(^{35}\) Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, pp. 214.

The Austrian Freudian psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Stekel contributed three important terms to the vernacular of psychoanalysis, which in turn were applied to the concept of transvestism. “Parapathia stands for neurosis, paralogia for psychosis, and paraphilia for perversion,” he explained in the preface of his 1930 book, *Sexual Aberrations: The Phenomenon of Fetishism in Relation to Sex*. Stekel and his colleague Emil Gutheil classified fetishism as one of the paraphilias. They scrutinized earlier specialists’ writings on this topic and identified homosexual tendencies that, they claimed, hadn’t been located because of a lack of deep psychoanalysis. As the twentieth century progressed, the belief that cross-dressers were created by anxiety-inducing events in childhood that caused fear of castration in men became predominant. By creating an imaginary phallic woman and then identifying with her, transvestites were theorized to attempt to overcome this fear. These were the leading psychoanalytical paradigms of the first half of the twentieth century.

*Homosexual Identity and Camp*

There have been many cultural misperceptions of gendered dress. Cross-dressing in Western culture is linked to homosexuality and gay identity, because for many years they were considered to be one and the same. Before the last third of the nineteenth century, same sex acts were seen, from a Christian point of view, as morally transgressive and described as sodomy. However, these deviant sexual acts were evaluated individually

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37 Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, pp. 214-215.

38 Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, p. 216.
and specifically. It was believed that anyone could engage in this type of “sinful” behavior. It wasn’t until 1869 that the concept of the homosexual developed and with it, a specific homosexual social identity. In his influential three-volume study, *The History of Sexuality*, published between 1976 and 1984, French philosopher Michel Foucault pointed to the moment in time when the casual sodomite became the “homosexual.” While sodomy was a category of forbidden acts, he wrote, the homosexual was a person. The act of sodomy had ephemeral properties, but homosexuality “transposed” it into “a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodisim of the soul.”

The medical classification of the homosexual by nineteenth-century physicians and psychiatrists introduced a new type of identity. As homosexual status was increasingly believed to be determined by one’s sexual wishes, rather than from the private performance of sexual acts, there emerged an idea that one could recognize a homosexual person through visual data. What were the criteria, since the sex act itself was not part of the public observable sphere? The public sign for locating and identifying the homosexual became the transvestite. It was broadly understood that all cross-dressers were homosexuals and vice versa. This idea was so prevalent that when Havelock Ellis proposed that there might be room for separation of these two groups in 1910, he was ridiculed by the medical community and this theory remained prevalent until the 1960’s. Meyer notes that during the First World War, men would only need to report to

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recruitment boards dressed as women, to prove homosexual status that would exclude them from joining.\textsuperscript{41}

The term “camp” appeared in J. Redding Ware’s 1909 dictionary of slang, \textit{Passing English of the Victorian Era}, in which it was defined as, “Actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis. Probably from the French. Used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character.”\textsuperscript{42} Though its origins indicate a Francophobic association between Frenchness and effeminacy, by the late twentieth century, the term “camp” seemed to elude definition. “Camping” in the early part of the twentieth century, however, implied cross dressing, and a performance of exaggerative femininity. Cross-dressing, in some circles, even became a “badge of identification.”\textsuperscript{43} Men wearing women’s clothing in the 1920s were understood to be homosexual, while their sexual partners (who remained dressed as men) were not. This was accepted by both gay and non-gay publics. Sexual acts were not taken into consideration in determining one’s sexual orientation; rather, the gender role one assumed determined one’s gender identity.\textsuperscript{44} A man wearing women’s clothing in the 1920’s identified himself as homosexual. Duchamp’s cross-dressing during this period may certainly be understood as “camping,” which may help explain why it took much longer for critics and art historians

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{43} Meyer, \textit{An Archaeology of Posing}, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{44} Meyer, \textit{An Archaeology of Posing}, p. 61.
to examine seriously Duchamp’s performances as Rrose Sélavy than to investigate other concepts of his work.

It is important to be aware of certain terms and how they were considered to be implicit and sanctioned by medical narratives in the early part of the twentieth century so one may understand how radical Duchamp’s actions were when he decided to dress in women’s clothing in the 1920’s. It is well documented that Duchamp approached bourgeois norms as irrelevant and rejected the art world’s contemporaneous investigations, concerns and priorities, which he found unchallenging and banal. He specifically considered painting, and its infatuated focus on the physical side of this medium, having reached a critical dead end, no longer capable of challenging the artist or the viewer. It seems fitting that he would approach cross-dressing, a perceived homosexual practice, within his art to embody the sacramental nature of transformation, the alchemical androgyne. This decision points to the artist’s irreverence; by merging the sacred (the shamanic and the alchemical androgyne) with the profane (society’s ‘immoral,’ undesirable, and mentally-ill elements of society) Duchamp leveled any gravitas his topic might have had by removing bourgeois pretentions of propriety. Once homosexuality and cross-dressing were definitively identified and recognized broadly as separate, new specialized branches of discourse developed and their theories diverged. But for the first part of the twentieth century, understandings of homosexuality and cross-dressing were intertwined.

The well-known image of Duchamp cross-dressed as *Rrose Sélavy*, photographed in 1921 by Man Ray, is the quintessential image that embodied this alter ego. Duchamp first conjured Rrose Sélavy in 1920 when he signed his work, *Fresh Widow*, a small French window with the glass panes replaced by leather, with the name Rose Sélavy (with one ‘R’ at that time). His engagement with embodying a feminine self through cross-dressing was inaugurated a year later, when he posed for Man Ray in two separate sessions both in 1921. The second session, taken in April of 1921, produced the most recognizable image of this character.\(^{46}\) This time, the alternate moniker (Rose) was spelled Rrose (the double “Rr” changed the pronunciation to “Eros” in the French language. The surname spoken out loud formed the French expression “C’est la vie” which means “that’s life”). Though she had been conjured earlier, and had even been endowed with the authority and function of artist, the significance of a photographic portrait of Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy is that this action consecrated the physical manifestation of Duchamp’s alter ego, a departure from existing as a signature and turning into an embodied entity. This legendary impersonation implicated cross-dressing in critical artistic discourse and legitimated it.

This black and white photo was a collaborative project. Man Ray photographed the cross-dressed Duchamp as his alter ego, Rrose Sélavy in a series of photographs. The portrait has the feel of a fashion photograph, a style Man Ray was professionally renowned for and there is what David Hopkins refers to as, a “fetishistic attention” paid

to Sélay’s attire. The most memorable article of clothing in this photograph is the brimmed hat with a wide band of printed fabric with bold geometrical shapes. This fashionable hat was borrowed from friend Grace Ewing. Picabia’s long-time mistress posed for the delicately posed ringed hands in the image, which aided in creating a believable depiction of femininity. The rest of the outfit consisted of a dark top with a contrasting fur trim that lushly envelops Duchamp’s jaw line. All this supported by a neutral background. The photograph was retouched by Duchamp with ink and pencil to emphasize certain features; this was a common practice in fashion photography. This act aided in presenting an exaggerated shadowy sultriness that is connected with the evocation of the femme fatale. When Duchamp was asked why he created this persona, he stated that he was initially thinking he wanted to change identity and as a catholic, he thought of “becoming” a Jewish man initially, but couldn’t find a name he liked, so he decided to change his sex. Bradley Bailey posits that the name Rose was the seventh most common name in the Jewish American community, so in fact he did decide to create a Jewish persona. There is one more fact that may be connected to his choice of this name. John F. Moffitt describes common neo-alchemical ideas that could be found in


contemporaneous printed matter that was being circulated in France. The rose, is
described as the “initiatory herb”, used for purifications or for magical operations.53

Alchemy and the Androgyne

Author Lanier Graham explains that androgyny was a common trope often
employed within modern art in the early twentieth century.54 A secular exploration for
the spiritual was a common investigation amongst Surrealists. Andre Breton wrote that
the undertaking of locating the primordial androgyne was essential. Both Dadaists and
Surrealists alike were familiar with androgyynes in alchemy as a symbol for enlightened
consciousness. For example, Paul Klee was considered by many to be an alchemist, and
Constantin Brancusi, a close friend of Duchamp’s, studied androgyne symbolism, both
through an occultist lens and through eastern myth.55 Lanier Graham points to a
conversation he had with Duchamp when he was a curator at New York’s Museum of
Modern Art. When asked if he would call his perspective alchemical, Duchamp replied:

We may. It is an Alchemical understanding. But don’t stop there! If we do, some
will think I’ll be trying to turn lead into gold back in the kitchen [laughing].
Alchemy is a kind of philosophy, a kind of thinking that leads to a way of
understanding. We may also call this perspective Tantric (as Brancusi would say),
or (as you like to say) Perennial. The Androgyne is not limited to any religion or

philosophy. If one has become the Androgyne one no longer has the need for philosophy.\textsuperscript{56}

So, we might wonder, how is alchemy connected to Art, and what does androgyny have to do with alchemy? This interest in alchemy by artists initially seems perplexing. This section will aid in a brief untangling of alchemy’s complicated, if not utterly confusing, place in culture and its’ shifting definitions through time. The most common understanding of alchemy is that it is a now-defunct and invalidated pseudo-scientific medieval endeavor that involved the attempt to transmute base metals, such as lead, into gold. This was referred to as chrysopoeia. This process was depicted in a series of cryptic images that always would conclude with the depiction of the materialization of an androgynous being, described as the Rebis or the alchemical androgyne which marked the instance that transmutation occurred.

This is only a limited and simplistic definition of this practice, which has its origins in ancient Egypt, and which traveled to China where some of its texts were rediscovered once translated from Arabic.\textsuperscript{57} These ideas were built on book two of Aristotle’s \textit{Physics}, and appear in his theory of first matter or \textit{prima materia}. The four elements: fire, air, water, and earth, when bound together formed \textit{prima mixta}, the first \textit{mixeds}, mercury and sulphur. When combined these formed all other metals and materials.\textsuperscript{58} Alchemists claimed that they could replicate—not just imitate—natural

\textsuperscript{56} Graham, \textit{Duchamp and Androgyne}, p. 15.


products. These claims specifically stated that human art can either mimic nature or it can perfect nature, thus alchemy was developed as a “perfective art.” A central figure in alchemy as well as the hermetic imagination was Hermes Trismegistus (the thrice greatest), known as Mercury in Latin. In fact, a mercurial demeanor seems to be a characteristic of the alchemical doctrine. This mythic figure was said to have brought all knowledge of natural and supernatural things, on an emerald tablet, the “Tabula Smaragdina.”

One may connect Duchamp’s 1934 work, *The Green Box*, which contained all his preparatory writings and drawings for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even*, to the emerald tablet. A promise of clarification is held in both these works, yet it never comes.

By the time of the Enlightenment, the practice of alchemy became the pariah of the scientific world (sometime around the 1720s). Chrysopoeia was removed from any serious sort of scientific inquiry in a campaign so thorough and aggressive that it had no respectable advocates within a generation. Until 1718, chemistry and alchemy were synonymous; by 1737 academics were defending chemistry from critics and admitting that, as a discipline, it had an embarrassing past. Soon thereafter all academics disavowed any connection to alchemy. Alchemy didn’t fit the Enlightenment’s new system of knowledge production and thus represented the Other and consequently was sentenced to exile. The struggle for a new identity was successful but at the expense of alchemy’s visibility within science history. Alchemy enjoyed a revival in the late nineteenth century


but it was limited within secret societies. Its resurgence in the late nineteenth century was much broader but was observed in an occultist capacity connected to spiritual practices that concerned transformations pertaining to the self rather than chrysopoeia in Victorian times.62

During the Victorian period alchemy was taken up by Romantic writers and artists as an allegory for transcendence more generally. By the end of the nineteenth century, the role of the alchemist was assigned to be in service of the modernist artistic endeavor. Though this figure wasn’t invented by the Symbolists, the motif of hermetic pursuit continued to stand for worldly mastery as well as spiritual realization, achieved only through laborious initiation of the process of alchemy. Arthur Rimbaud, like many other Symbolists, related his inner quest as an artist to the alchemical tradition. This “neo-hermetic analogy” was initially applied to the Poet-Genius but was soon thereafter applied to the visual artist.63 Alchemy and the “Occult Sciences” (as their authors referred to them) were popular in late nineteenth-century culture and were readily accessible in the same way that Freudian, Marxist, and Einsteinian systems represent our established belief systems today. Rather than focusing on the physical manipulations that alchemy described, the symbolists placed metaphorical value upon it. The idea of gold drawn from lead allowed for a potent spiritual symbolism. This neo-alchemical view imbued the artist with the symbolic significance of taking on this pursuit.64 John F. Moffit states: “In

63 Moffitt, Alchemist of the Avant-Garde, p. 37.
64 Ibid.
metaphysical terms, the material world presents itself to the modern alchemist as a flux of contingent events and relative objects”.65

Alchemists described themselves as philosophers and their work as “philosophical art.”66 Alchemical literature consisted mostly of inscrutable symbols which were used to transmit arcane information and esoteric knowledge.67 These images were meant to be deciphered and read by those in the know in a certain order to reach an enlightened state thus changing the mundane and base metal into gold metaphorically. Alchemists offered no apologies for their impenetrable interactions; instead they defined themselves thusly.

In the 1990 Weinheim edition of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, a rather laconic self-definition can be found: “Wherever we have spoken openly we have actually said nothing; But where we have written something in code and in pictures we have concealed the truth”.68 The linguistic and semiotic chaos of their tangled formations of unknowable references is a labyrinth of ever-shifting code names and signs for clandestine materials, in which everything could always connote something else.

Alchemical literature possesses a suggestive vernacular that was rich in allegories, homophony, and word play.69 This can be connected to Duchampian art practice but it is also noted that wordplay was a much loved past time; Duchamp’s love of word play can be found in his writings as well as several titles of his work such as his last painting, *Tu m’* , his mustachioed Mona Lisa postcard, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Elle a Chaud au Cul), and

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Walter Arensberg, a chief patron of Duchamp’s as well the organizer of the Arensburg neo-Dadaist circle Duchamp spent most of his free time with in New York, was obsessed with cryptography. Although Duchamp maintained a skeptical stance, these ideas were constantly examined and David Reed claims that it led him to experimentations within his art practice that involved cryptic messages. With his closest friend, Francis Picabia, as well as the Mexican caricaturist Marius de Zayas, Duchamp spent much time on elaborate games with words. Alchemists strove by means of their thought pictures “to reach the intellect via the senses.” This idea can be conceptually tied to Duchamp’s famous statement, “Art should be cerebral rather than retinal.”

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung wrote about Alchemy in the 1960’s and approached its external chemical mechanism as the scientific projection of psychological developments. Though Duchamp was not directly influenced by Jung’s writings on alchemy, Jung’s descriptions of the phases and figures of alchemy can help us to understand the concept of the alchemical Androgyne. The first image is the Mercurial Fountain, which is also called the Uterus and represents the Opus. The second image is The King and Queen, representing the feminine and the masculine. Then there is the Naked Truth, the Immersion in the Fountain, the Conjuction also known as the alchemical marriage, Death,

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71 Reed “The Developing Language of the Readymades,” p. 221.
the Ascent of the Soul, Purification, the Return of the Soul, and finally the tenth image is referred to as the New Birth.\textsuperscript{75} This final image depicted an androgynous figure that was vertically divided into a half man and half woman. This is the image of the alchemical Androgyne, or the Rebis. This hybrid double-thing, which is what Rebis means, is a visual representation of self-actualization, the transmutation of humanity’s base nature into gold.

At least since the beginning of the nineteenth century the sciences have denied any historical connection to or association with alchemy, which was exiled and approached as an academic taboo. It is because of this rejection, however, that artists became interested in the concept of alchemy, the rich visual vernacular of which was preserved in occultist practices. Artists transformed alchemical ideas into a theory of personal transformation and spiritual enlightenment. But as historians of science today have endeavored to reintegrate alchemy into their narratives, they once again are editing alchemy’s scope and ambitions as they find certain ideas and ambitions irreconcilable to science.

*Shamanism*

In many cultural practices around the world and through history, shamans were spiritual figures imbued with special knowledge and abilities to move between worlds.

\textsuperscript{75} Schwartz-Salant, *Jung on Alchemy*, pp. 189-214.
and have been associated with cross-dressing.\textsuperscript{76} Sometimes male shamans wear women’s clothes or have breasts depicted on their clothes, in order to manifest their inner feminine side, which was understood to connect them to what Jung referred to as the “Ghost Land” (the unconscious and perhaps what Duchamp named the “infra thin”).\textsuperscript{77} Jung’s writings on the role shamans play as well as their shape shifting abilities, their “Mystical Participation” and the anima can also be applied to Rrose Sélavy.\textsuperscript{78} He wrote, “The anima is the personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man’s psyche, such as vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for love, feeling for nature and finally his relation to the unconscious”.\textsuperscript{79} Doniger writes that chaos is separated into negative and positive aspects within the context of male to female transformations. Positive chaos creates fusing, she explains, while negative (destructive) chaos is attached to devastation. Positive chaos was only brought on by male to female transformations, mythically, and this scheme extends to shamanic rituals of transformation and transcendence.\textsuperscript{80} Alchemy and shamanism, both of which contained paths to transcendence, were particularly meaningful for Duchamp, and elements of both may be seen in his performance as Rrose Sélavy. The existence of the shaman, Jung wrote, points to “man’s need for liberation from any state of being that is too fixed or

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Wendy Doniger, \textit{Women, Androgynes, and other Mythical Beasts} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 285-289
  \item \textsuperscript{77} Carl G. Jung, \textit{Man and His Symbols} (London: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1964), 177.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Jung, \textit{Man and His Symbols}, p. 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{79} Jung, \textit{Man and His Symbols}, p. 177.
  \item \textsuperscript{80} Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, \textit{Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 294.
\end{itemize}
final. For the artist who proclaimed his most famous work, *The Large Glass*, was “definitively unfinished,” one can see why these concepts would appeal to him.

*The Infra Thin*

Duchamp’s interest in embodying The Alchemical Androgyne as shamanistic transformation, through the act of cross-dressing, was only part of the artist’s inquiry. He also found the concept of the fourth dimension intriguing. Cros cites, author Gaston de Pawlawski’s *Journey to the Land of the Fourth Dimension*, as an influence that aided him in conceiving a state he referred to as the infra mince (the infra thin). Dalrymple on the other hand brings up the American fourth dimension theorist Claude Bragdon and his 1913 work *Primer of Higher Space (the Fourth Dimension)* as the most likely influence. Duchamp described this concept writing, “When the tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhales it, the two odors are married by infra slim.” He also used the word ‘thin’ because of its human “affective connotations” rather than using an exact laboratory measure. Duchamp’s quasi-scientific approach is analyzed by Herbert Molderings, who describes a narrative that emerged, of Duchamp as an “artist-engineer-scientist,” because of his known interest in mathematician Henri Poincare. But ultimately

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Duchamp’s art, and his non-scientific quest for “regions which are not ruled by time and space,” contradicted the rationalism of Poincare’s mathematical theories. Poincare posited in 1887 that the axioms of geometry are neither empirical nor true a priori but are, instead, conventions, whose truth it is pointless to question. Rather, Herbert Molderings states, Duchamp’s art practice can be aligned with French philosopher and mathematician, Edouard Le Roy’s whose theory stated that all laws, axioms and standard measures are the arbitrary constructs of science. Duchamp’s interest in invoking alchemical processes and its end result with his creation of Rrose Sélavy, went further than simply following mystical practices in the capacity of the acolyte. Rather he applied alchemy in his practice as if it were a scientific system. With these experiments, he destabilized the predominance of science as the prevailing model used to explain the world.

This instability can be experienced aurally as well, when the alter ego’s name is spoken. In *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was: Myths of Self-Imitation*, Doniger describes instances in literature, theatre and cinema, in which a character is pretending to be someone else, pretending to be the character, in effect, the original character is impersonating herself. She identifies a phenomenon she calls the gender triple cross. Her theory could also be applied to the character and name Rrose Sélavy. He is a male artist, impersonating a woman. Her name is Rrose. When spoken out loud the sound of the name turns masculine again: “Eros,” the deity of erotically charged love, is

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historically represented as male. Though it may visually confuse the eye in its written form (textually), once spoken (verbally), it turns male again.

From male (Duchamp) to female (Rrose the image) to male again (the name is pronounced as “EROS” though initially the eye reads it as Rose. This places one more layer of gender instability to his alter ego. This back and forth created the here and there-ness of identity. Something unfixed that may be connected with Duchamp’s idea of the infra thin. His affinity to fluidity, the alchemical marriage, and self-realization accomplished within the locale of the infra thin, are anchors one may use to think about Rrose Sélavy as an alchemical Androgyne manifesting and existing in that infra thin space as both Duchamp, Sélavy, and Rebis, simultaneously.
CHAPTER 2

CLAUDE CAHUN: INVERSION AND RESISTANCE

Claude Cahun’s groundbreaking artistic practice has left us with an opportunity to examine cross-dressing and androgyny within the early part of the twentieth century, as performed and embodied by a female artist. Since Cahun’s work was lost to us until the early 1990’s, her cross-dressing investigations and writings on questioning gender cannot be said to have inspired the artists who cross-dressed in the 1970’s. Though the narrative itself can be described as limited in terms of its influence since it has only one representative, Cahun’s work is important because it allows us to view how one female artist confronted the medical-model of homosexuality and the theory of sexual inversion in the early part of the twentieth century. Her writings, her work in avant-garde theatre in Paris, as well as her self-portraits and her collaborative work with her life partner Suzanne Malherbe, also known as Marcel Moore, point to an oeuvre that challenged the whole concept of gender and its stability by means of image as well as text. Self-portraits figure among the earliest of her photographs dating to 1911, and are consistently featured in her visual production until the end of her life.87 Since so much of Cahun’s work was a refusal of traditional roles, I will discuss her 1925 work Heroines, her black-and-white photographic Self-Portrait (c. 1928), depicting Cahun in a men’s checkered sports jacket, and her text impersonation of Nazi German soldiers during World War II through a

87 Rice, Inverted Odysseys, pp. 113.
newsletter she produced collaboratively with Marcel Moore, as an act of political resistance. Before we investigate these portraits and activities, however, let us look more closely at the theories of inversion that were part of the medical models of homosexuality. Cahun was engaged, well-versed and greatly influenced by this discourse. In fact, she was the first who translated into French the writings of Havelock Ellis, the English sexologist who posited that homosexuality was “the third sex.”

Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century Theories of Same-sex Desire in Women

In Female Masculinity, Judith Halberstam describes the four types of lesbians as sexologist Krafft-Ebing identified them in Psychopathia Sexualis: “Women who were available to the attention of masculine inverts but not masculine themselves, cross-dressers, fully developed inverts who looked masculine and took a masculine role, and degenerative homosexuals who were practically male.” Based on Krafft-Ebing’s work, Havelock Ellis elaborated on this taxonomy, calling attention to the differentiation between masculine and feminine inverts. The feminine invert, he posited, was a social rather than a sexual deviant. Having been rejected by men, this type had been forced into the arms of the masculine invert. The masculine invert was understood to be a congenital condition, essentially masculine. Sexual inversion proposed both biological as well as social reasons for homosexuality. Halberstam identifies two underlying agendas in this

88 Rice, Inverted Odysseys, p.117.
89 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, p. 76.
90 Halberstam Female Masculinity, p. 78
work of classification, the first being a desire to achieve tolerance through presenting the 
naturalness of homosexuality, the second reason involved a will to reduce sexuality so 
that it would fit within the idea of the binary system of gender difference.91 To add insult 
to injury, women were conceived to be derivative of male identity through the frame of 
psychoanalysis, which furthermore caused the faulty interpretation of their nature, their 
desires as well as their motives. This obscured any other type of analysis pertaining to 
women. Ellis’ progressive work sought to create tolerance for homosexuals in society and 
for the halting of inverts’ demonization. Still, he presumed that everyone would want to 
be a man in a male-dominated society at least symbolically.

The term ‘lesbian’ became an umbrella term for same-sex desire in women, but 
Halberstam notes that one should be aware that this may obscure our understanding of 
said same-sex desire as there is no trans-historical term that could describe the variety of 
human interactions that existed before the binary system was developed and enforced by 
sexologists.92 Before the term lesbian emerged as the definitive identifying word, 
numerous terms existed that described separate understandings of same sex desire in 
women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The terms, hermaphrodite, 
tribade, female husband along with romantic friend, and Tommy were some of these. All 
of these terms dealt with subtle differences in behavior and comportment. For example, 
Tommies were women who didn’t identify themselves as women. It is curious to note 
that this word became synonymous with the word prostitute by the mid-nineteenth 
century. Halberstam posits that this may have had to do with masculinity and prostitution

91 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 76.

92 Halberstam *Female Masculinity*, p. 51
being conditions positioned immediately in opposition to marriageability.\textsuperscript{93} As getting married was of such importance, motherhood in the nineteenth century was construed as the highest calling for women, who were thought to be the “natural” guardians of children. Since children needed to be isolated from society until they grew up, so did women, who were viewed as child-like and innocent themselves. Ideas like these are termed Victorianism. Victorianism celebrated the veneer of respectability while trying to cover a persistent “seething sexuality”.\textsuperscript{94} The middle class particularly projected a mindful rectitude accompanied by the full acceptance of male authority as innate, proclaiming thusly that their society was more moral than any from the past. Appearances became more important than reality. Social requirements demanded that women’s gestures be void of any sign of masculinity and the women who did not follow these strict mores were shunned. The world was understood as being good and bad; good women were virtuous and pure, bad women represented sexuality. Prostitutes were the group that suffered the most from this binary classification.\textsuperscript{95} Creative activities were gendered as well. Women were allowed to paint and sketch but not with oil paints and only certain themes were approved. They were not allowed to play any musical instrument professionally. The garments of this period echoed and enforced these restrictive practices. Even ones gait was restricted, as in the 1880s the knees were tied together in order to maintain a gender appropriate bearing.\textsuperscript{96} Another term that was used is tribade, which means “a woman who rubs” in Greek; this was a concept that was

\textsuperscript{93} Halberstam, \textit{Female Masculinity}, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{94} Bullough and Bullough, \textit{Cross-dressing, Sex and Gender}, p. 154

\textsuperscript{95} Bullough and Bullough, \textit{Cross-dressing, Sex and Gender}, pp. 153-155.

\textsuperscript{96} Bullough and Bullough, \textit{Cross-dressing, Sex and Gender}, pp. 155.
linked to the term hermaphrodite. Physiological differences were attributed to tribades, such as the presence of an enlarged hermaphroditic clitoris. A fusion of meanings existed where the terms hermaphrodite and the third sex were being used interchangeably. Until the eighteenth century, the one-sex model was used when conceiving the human body. A woman was understood to be an inverted man. Male and female genitalia were considered to be analogous; women had their genitalia on the inside, men had them on the outside. It was only in the late eighteenth century that a two-sex model emerged. The romantic friendship was allotted to women who spent all their time together but who didn’t have a sexual relationship. The female husband was a term that described female transvestism and male impersonation.

Claude Cahun was born Lucie Renée Mathilde Schwob in 1894, to a literary family in Nantes. Her father directed the local newspaper Le Fare de la Loire, and her uncle, Leon Cahun, wrote historical novels and was close to the Symbolists. He was said to have encouraged the young poet Guillaume Apollinaire. In her youth, Cahun was primarily influenced by the literary Symbolist movement, a fact she was all too aware of and wanted to get away from. She sought to find her own style of writing and did so by the time she worked on her first major work. Cahun’s upbringing led to a lifelong erudite engagement with literature, ranging from ancient myths to contemporary

97 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, p. 59.
98 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, p. 60.
99 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, p. 67.
101 Downie, Don’t Kiss Me, pp.13-14.
discourses on political philosophy, as well as the arts. Schwob’s lifelong partnership with Suzanne Malherbe began soon after 1909, when they met at the Lycee. In 1914 while studying philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne, Cahun published her first article “Vues et Visions” under her first pseudonym Claude Courlis. It was at this time that she embarked on her first major project Les Jeux Uraiens (Uranian Games), a semi-autobiographical text with references that ranged from Goethe’s Faust to Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. Les Jeux Uraiens displayed her formidable literary knowledge and showcased her familiarity and engagement with the discourse of homosexuality of which she would combat rigid gender proscription. The title itself is a reference to Karl Heinrich Ulrich’s term Uranian, referring to gay and lesbian identities. This is the first instance in which the artist used the gender indistinct name, Claude Cahun. Cahun used many other pseudonyms for her writing projects however ‘Claude Cahun’ was more than a pseudonym. Though this name owed its origins to the literary tradition of the pseudonym initially, it became an alter ego that took on a life of its own; a name that eclipsed her legal one and accompanied her to Paris, where she became actively engaged in leftist political theories and wrote as a theorist herself during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Her work Les Paris Sont Ouverts was a political tract that influenced Andre Breton. Her affiliations to Breton and the Surrealist movement, despite of Breton’s homophobia, are well documented. As the artist conducted her life in Paris as Claude Cahun, where she developed her many political and avant-garde affiliations, she

102 Downie, Don’t Kiss Me, pp. 11.
103 Downie, Don’t Kiss Me, pp. 12.
104 Rice, Inverted Odysseys, pp. 21
105 Rice, Inverted Odysseys, pp. 116.
stepped into the name and became it, providing it with privileged properties over her other names that existed only on paper. It attained a three dimensional existence and throughout Cahun’s life, the itinerant nature of her gender views can be observed in this name as well. Her performative predisposition was embodied as she actively participated in experimental theatre, the stage allowing for her own early experimentation with numerous personae. Most notable is the couple’s participation with the obscure theatre company, Le Plateau. Cahun admired director Pierre Albert-Birot's ideas on avant-garde theatre, and performed in risqué roles such as Satan and Monsieur, a dashing dandy of a man in the play *le Banlieue*.

Cahun’s work *Heroines*, published in 1925, is an example of the artist’s constant polemic rejection of the designated roles women were assigned not only in contemporary society but also historically. In this work Cahun chose fifteen female figures from the bible, fairy tales, Greek myth, and history and through the authority of the author, she endowed them with a voice and progressive political opinions which had never been traditionally explored. Five of the characters were biblical: Eve, Delilah, Judith, Salome, and the Virgin Mary. Four were classical: Helen, Penelope, Sappho, and Salmacis (the mythic origin of the androgyne). Four are literary: Marguerite from the story of Faust, Beauty (from Beauty and the Beast), Cinderella, and Sophie from *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. Cahun placed all these characters in the twentieth century to show the persistence of certain stereotypical preconceptions about women such as their vanity and how they marvel at their beauty, how their duty still remains within the home and with maintaining

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106 Downie, *Don’t Kiss Me*, pp. 24.
a happy family, and the belief that marrying a prince is every woman’s dream.\textsuperscript{107} Cahun then disrupted those preconceptions, for example, by revealing that Cinderella’s prince had a foot fetish. This black humor is a device that Cahun employed to disrupt complacent assumptions. Eve, when kicked out of paradise, lands in the twentieth century and is faced with an advertisement for fruit, its logo designed with serpents. Beauty prefers the Beast to the prince. Cahun used colloquial language for her revised characters. The last sentence in \textit{Salmacis the Sufragette}, her penultimate story in \textit{Heroines}, reads: “Hermaphrodite can visit the house of Narcissus- and introduce himself there on my behalf.”\textsuperscript{108} The figure of Narcissus was used in Symbolist literature and was linked to homosexuality, a fact that Cahun was aware of. She used Narcissus as a trope in other works of hers as well. The final character Cahun wrote about is the androgyne. Cahun identified with these archetypes and knew that they were understood as cultural role models.\textsuperscript{109} After Cahun is done with them, these women’s previously unexamined narratives are revealed as presumptuous constructions set up by a patronizing status quo. Cahun presents an anti-conformist in every character. Her interpretations are both revolutionary and quite acerbic. One may observe in this work that Cahun is acutely critical of society’s regulatory nature and she rejects this institutional assumption that women have nothing surprising to say. Every norm is questioned and all the characters reject the roles that mythified them.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{108} Rice, \textit{Inverted Odysseys}, pp. 90.

\textsuperscript{109} Rice, \textit{Inverted Odysseys}, p. 91.
Cahun began producing photographic self-portraits as a teenager. Her self-portraits from the 1920s focused on her body, her face and her clothing. Shelley Rice notes that the only photographic work that was shown to the public during Cahun’s lifetime was her 1930’s book *Aveux non Avenus*, a collaborative project created with Marcel Moore that included ten photo-collages.110 This would render her self-portraits exclusively private, a personal practice reserved for private investigation rather than outward declarations made with an audience in mind. However, in *Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore* there is a photograph of a store-front window where the specific 1928 self-portrait I discuss in this essay is publicly displayed. The photograph is from 1930 and it is of the mini-exhibition of Cahun and Moore’s *Aveux non Avenus* launch that was held in this bookstore. In this portrait, Cahun is shown with cropped hair and in a stylish light-colored slightly oversized checkered men’s sports coat. Cahun is holding up the collar and her expression is somber and defiant. Cahun’s figure is located on the left side of the image while her mirrored image takes up the right side. She is looking at the viewer, away from the mirror. It is tilted so the image viewed in the mirror is at a surprising angle. Since this photograph was only ever exhibited with the launch of this project, which dealt with attempting to rewrite Narcissus and the social meanings connected to him, one cannot ignore the mirror in the photograph. The contrast of the two Cahuns is striking. The Cahun that is being photographed is aware of the camera and is looking right at the viewer, while the reflection appears to be pensive and unaware. Once again Cahun wants to deconstruct and renew a mythological figure. Cahun rewrote a known

mythical narrative and demands that the viewer (and the reader) gains a new perspective. Just like the characters in Heroines, Narcissus’ story, which was used by the Symbolists regularly and alluded to male homosexuality, was getting a new voice and a new attitude. Cahun boldly engaged in and fearlessly affirmed her own Otherness, while questioning older interpretations of Narcissus. In The equivocal “I”: Claude Cahun as Lesbian Subject, Solomon-Godeau has written that Cahun presents herself “unambiguously as a male subject” and specifically a dandy.111 Solomon-Godeau points out that Cahun never referred to herself as a lesbian in her writing and suggests that the artist engaged rather in androgyny. Wendy Doniger points to the difference between androgyny and the concept of the androgyne. The true mythical androgyne is an enduring symbol, a creature simultaneously and equally male and female in form.112 Cahun seems to be androgynous without invoking the religious androgyne. Her refusal of the term lesbian is not necessarily difficult to understand, as the word identifies one as a woman, and perhaps Cahun wasn’t interested in owning this designation.

Resistance through Impersonation

Even through her confrontation against fascism and totalitarianism, Cahun’s engagement with impersonation and role playing was ubiquitous. During World War II, Cahun and Moore had moved permanently to Jersey. There they produced a small edition hand-typed newsletter, which masqueraded as mutinous literature distributed broadly, across Europe within the Nazi ranks as early as 1940. Cahun impersonated multiple Nazi

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111 Rice, Inverted Odysseys, p. 117.

112 Doniger, Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts, pp. 283.
soldiers who allegedly resisted the Nazi program. These multiple fictional author
impersonations through text for the purpose of Nazi resistance, reveals her all-inclusive
and wide-ranging conviction in fluidity. The fact that Cahun refused to accept that all
German soldiers could truly support the Nazi party’s rhetoric and principles shows that
her flexibility included others and her perception of them. Cahun’s work in this case once
more questioned the system. Her goal was to introduce crisis and plant seeds of doubt in
the minds of real Nazi soldiers. She allowed that ambiguity to seep in and believed that
there must be soldiers who would reject the Nazi ideology, once faced with a plea by one
of their own who challenged the rigid rules and credo imposed by the Fuhrer. Black and
white thinking was under attack with this act of resistance. Cahun believed that once the
newsletter was read some would surely question the righteousness of their actions,
causing them to abandon their positions and become deserters. From 1942 they signed
their texts as *Der Soldat ohne Namen und seine Kameraden*, to create the illusion that the
newsletter was a collective effort.\(^\text{113}\) It was these politically loaded impersonations that
would bring Cahun and Moore, in front of a military court. They were arrested in July
1944.\(^\text{114}\) They were sentenced to six years in prison for listening to the radio and
sentenced to death for distributing the newsletter. Though the death sentence was decided
to take place first, the bailiff Alexander Coutanche appealed against execution and
succeeded.\(^\text{115}\) Cahun and Moore remained imprisoned, mostly in solitary confinement
until the liberation of Jersey on May 9th, 1945.

\(^{113}\) Downie, *Don’t Kiss Me*, p. 20.

\(^{114}\) Downie, *Don’t Kiss Me*, p. 20.

\(^{115}\) Downie, *Don’t Kiss Me*, p. 21.
Because Cahun’s works were lost for decades and rediscovered in the late part of
the twentieth century, subsequent female-to-male cross-dressing performances were not
informed by her work. Unlike the male-to-female discourses that were connected by
Duchamp’s cross-dressing, Cahun’s narrative is insular yet expansive. Cahun’s
engagement with multiple mediums in her art practice was comparable to Marcel
Duchamp’s. She demonstrated a multi-disciplinary approach to it and some of her work
may not even initially register as art upon initial examination, just like Duchamp’s
lifelong engagement to the art world even after claiming to have quit art making. As we
look back, we recognize these gestures as legitimate and time-honored within the art
practice tradition. These works reveal an engagement with the discourse of art. Her
commitment to challenging gender through her work as well as assuming the gender-
ambiguous moniker she went by for periods in her life (but also going back to the name
Lucie Schwob), reveal an artist profoundly immersed in constructed identity, the
nuisance and nuance of gender that can only be reconciled by refusing fixity and
embracing fluidity. Cahun was well-versed in medical theories of homosexuality and
inversion. Her collaborative art projects with Moore tackled the trope of Narcissus, a
familiar Symbolist reference to male homosexuality. Cahun inserted herself boldly into
this presumed exclusively male symbolist discourse and includes herself in it, portraying
herself as the third sex. She rebelled against any fixed ideas about the role and intrinsic
nature of woman and especially those that claimed to know the assumed parameters and
properties of her own identity. Cahun was fluent in the vernacular of ambiguity. She
disrupted common ideas of gender, woman’s role in society, political atmospheres, and
anything else that was perceived to be restrictive was her modus operandi. When she
moved to Jersey during World War II, she used her given name once more, but through her acts of resistance under Nazi reign she once again became entangled in impersonation; she employed the guise of the anonymous mutinous Nazi soldier. Cahun played with personas even under penalty of death. Cahun’s fluidity can be finally manifested to this day when one observes that certain art historians refer to her as Cahun, while others as Schwob. This amphi-identification underscores her legacy nicely.
CHAPTER 3
ELEANOR ANTIN: POST-KINSEY REPORT CROSS-DRESSING, PERFORMANCE ART, FEMINISM AND THE FIGURE OF THE LOSER

Eleanor Antin’s performance The King of Solana Beach (1972-1974) introduces the third narrative of cross-dressing in twentieth-century art. Antin’s cross-dressing emerged from a period of social and political unrest, which included the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the emergence of feminist art and its focus on revealing the status quo’s indifference to issues such as race, class, and sexuality as well as its refusal to adhere to the art world’s rigid visual conventions and its aesthetic canon. After the predominance of conceptual art, feminist art assertively re-introduced narrative back into the art world often through the medium of performance art, which emerged in the 1960’s and is linked to minimalism, not theatre. An acknowledgement of the artist’s bodily presence, in the process of art making, developed into performance art.\(^{116}\) Both “guileless and ironic,” performance sought to fortify both the social as well as the socializing elements of the work.\(^{117}\) Performance implicated the spectator and demanded that one takes responsibility for what was occurring, then responding and interacting with it, or choosing not to. A performance was often times

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documented through photography and the new medium of video. The ephemeral properties of performance went against capitalist markets structure and rejected the artwork as commodity.\textsuperscript{118} One can observe a direct contribution in political activity by artists in this period. Feminism had an enormous impact on art criticism and art in the 1970s, its theoretical framework being neo-Marxist. An engagement of a meticulous and toothed nature over the distribution of power among those who produce versus those who possess the means of production was a main concern of feminism’s. Language itself was found to be complicit in the preservation of the status quo.\textsuperscript{119}

Artist Eleanor Antin is considered to be a leading figure in conceptual, feminist, and performance art which was popularized in the 1960’s. She experimented and created multiple personae from 1972 to 1991 which she referred to as her “selves”. In these two decades, these “selves” included, but were not limited to, a nurse, a flight attendant, a black ballerina, and a king; some of these were even “performed” with mediums other than the artist’s body. She created paper dolls, movable sculptures and drawings as stand-ins for some of these “selves.” Her approach to art production was just as unfixed, as Antin had no preferential medium. Photography, performance, video, drawing, as well as the written word were all employed. She famously commented in 1974 “I consider the usual aids to self-definition- sex, age, talent, time and space- as tyrannical limitations upon my freedom of choice”.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118} Archer, \textit{Art Since 1960}, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{119} Archer, \textit{Art Since 1960}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{120} Emily Liebert, \textit{Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin’s “Selves}, (New York: The Trustees of Columbia University, 2013), 13.
Being Antinova (1980), a performance embodying a once renowned but now retired black aging ballerina, is Antin’s most controversial work and has generated the greatest quantity of scholarship. Since the selves all share a common attribute, a collective helplessness, and they can collectively be regarded as the artist’s investigation on identity, this essay will address Being Antinova briefly as well. Antin refers to all the “selves” as “losers” and expresses a preference to the failures over winners because she finds them more interesting. Even though Cherise Smith refers to the black ballerina performance as “racial drag” and scholars often employ the term drag for any and all types of impersonation, this essay focuses on male to female and female to male performances, and recognizes the term “drag” to describe only these performances.

Before we explore Antin’s 1974 work The King of Solana Beach, a female to male cross-dressing performance, let us briefly survey again the shifts that were taking place toward gender and sexuality at mid-century.

The First Kinsey Report

The first Kinsey report, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, published in 1948 was crucial in shaping American culture’s views on cross-dressing and homosexuality. Since the concept of homosexuality was constructed as a type and diagnosed as a mental illness, cross-dressing had been the primary way of identifying it. For the first time, these two concepts became uncoupled. Prior to the study of male sexuality issued by Alfred Kinsey, psychoanalysts and other medical authorities believed that homosexuality

\[121\] Liebert, Multiple Occupancy, p. 115.
constituted only .1 percent of the population, that’s one tenth of one percent. The Kinsey report radically altered society’s understanding of the prevalence of homosexuality, and further redefined what a homosexual looked like. Kinsey’s figures revealed that as much as 37 percent of American men had engaged in homosexual activity at some point in their lives and that, in fact, ten percent of the male population was identified as homosexual. This new understanding of its prevalence was surprising on its own, but isn’t the reason the Kinsey report is brought up in so many scholarly writings that involve homosexuality and cross-dressing. The re-conceptualization of the gay personality radically altered notions of gender that had been scientifically, medically and socially accepted since the mid-nineteenth century. Until this point, one would be identified as homosexual if gesture, posture, speech, or costume, (the cross-gender signifying codes) were visible. Kinsey’s assertion that the homosexual man didn’t necessarily act in an effeminate manner was a radical concept. This new information was unanticipated not only by non-gay Americans but by the gay community as well. The fact that cross-dressers were a very small minority within this group caused a rupture between the long-held belief that homosexuals and cross-dressers were one and the same.

Krafft-Ebing’s model of same-sex sexual activity had four degrees. The first two degrees were not considered effective ways to identify homosexuality rather only the

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third and fourth degree constituted the homosexual identity. This meant that Krafft-Ebing’s model identified individuals as homosexuals only in the presence of cross-gender signifying, as Krafft-Ebing asserted that diagnosis would be difficult when visual evidence wasn’t witnessed and he claimed that informant narratives were subjective.\footnote{Meyer, \textit{An Archaeology of Posing}, p. 76.}

Kinsey bypassed these concerns cited by Krafft-Ebing and created a new rating system that was made up of seven degrees. On the one end of the scale was the exclusive heterosexual who had been designated as a zero and on the other side he located the absolute homosexual. The middle was held by anyone who performed both concepts equally. The number, frequency and recurring patterns of specific sexual acts were measured, thus Kinsey rejected and reformulated older theories where “extrasexual theatrics” were depended on for identifying one’s sexuality. According to Kinsey, the only unfailing data that could be used were sex acts, which shifted the diagnosis of homosexuality from a qualitative to a quantitative one.\footnote{Meyer, \textit{An Archaeology of Posing}, p. 77.} Sexual performance replaced the significance of gender signifying acts. Moe Meyer writes about Kinsey’s methods: \footnote{Meyer. \textit{An Archaeology of Posing}, p. 78.}

\begin{quote}
though he believed he was ridding the diagnostic apparatus of its theoretical dependence upon essentialist notions of innate homosexuality by quantifying the discontinuities, he had, instead, shifted the perceptual frames of the symptomology by abstracting a concept of performance detached from its conventional theatrical gestalt to enable the inclusion of praxis of everyday life as manifested in mundane social acts (i.e. sex).
\end{quote}

This destabilization of social knowledge caused a panic. The fear of being surrounded by homosexuals, who could not be easily identified, Meyer posits, is one of
the key reasons that Senator Joe McCarthy, with his paranoiac and fear-mongering tactics, and the House Un-American Activities Committee was able to flourish.

Meanwhile, the medico-scientific community also experienced an overnight frenzied reorganization and re-definition. Everything that had been known was now invalid. Gender inversion theory became outdated and soon gave way to a new category, that of the transsexual. As Kinsey’s statistical findings seeped into the cultural consciousness of the mid-twentieth century, homosexuality and cross-dressing models diverged. In 1973 the revised third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), published by the American Psychiatric Association, removed homosexuality from its pages, but not cross-dressing, demonstrating the authority of the medical model. Psychiatry abruptly determined that these were two altogether separate mental disorders; one was removed eventually but cross-dressing has remained in the fifth edition of the DSM, referred to as transvestic disorder.

Dr. Robert Stoller, a psychoanalyst and professor of psychiatry at UCLA was the most frequently cited specialist of gender identity in the mid-century. In 1968, Stoller maintained that there was no such thing as a transvestite woman in other words, a woman sexually excited by wearing male clothing. Women who did wear men’s clothing were actually transsexual he maintained: In the cultural milieu of the mid to late 60’s with a new wave of feminism only beginning to manifest itself as a vital political movement, the mainstream expectation that the desire to be a man was “natural” seems to underlie

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Stoller’s theories. Stoller revised his absolute pronouncement against it later. Clinical data, remained at a minimum it was, “so rare, almost non-existent”.  

Eleanor Antin’s performed The King of Solana Beach from 1974 -1975. However the curators of the recent exhibition, Multiple Occupancies: Eleanor Antin’s “Selves,” identify three separate iterations of Antin’s performances as a king. The first appearance of the king was in 1972 and the work that was produced, which involve black and white photographs and video, are simply called The King. This image of her king “self,” Antin has explained was based on seventeenth-century court painter Anthony Van Dick’s portraits of the ill-fated Cavalier King Charles I of England. Accompanying these photographs is a 52-minute black and white silent video of the artist applying glue and positioning her beard onto her face and trimming it. The second king she performs is The King of Solana Beach, who wears identical attire to the first king. This work consists of eleven black-and-white photographs titled My Kingdom Fell upon Hard Times and Men, a series of five black and white photographs; five drawings called The King’s Meditation, which claim to be drawn by the king himself, are also part of this performance. The final king was performed in 1983 at the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Gallery. Antin performed El Desdichado (the unlucky one), her swarthiest king character, who walked around the gallery in an environment of life-size low-tech props made of wood and paper trees and structures. This essay will examine the black and white photographs created in 1974-1975.

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130 Garber, Vested Interests, pp. 98-99.
In these photos, Antin as the self-appointed King of Solana beach is depicted walking and surveying his land, going about certain banal and quotidian activities, such as picking up a prescription from a pharmacy, choosing fruit at a supermarket, and waiting in line at a bank. In some of these photos the King sits alone on an abandoned couch on a sidewalk, leans into a car and seems to be checking up on his subjects well-being and talking to them, he also sits and drinks beer with some long haired teenagers while appearing (through her expressions, gestures and poses) to dispense sage advice.

The King’s attire consisted of a wide-brimmed bush hat that appears to be made of blue corduroy, a silk ruffled front shirt, blue jeans (when exhibited in the Kemper Art Museum collection) and black pants (in the actual photographs that document her performance) that were tucked into tall leather two inch heeled boots, and a dark knee length wool cape with a dark red satin lining.131 While the photographs of this performance depict Antin in black pants, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum in St. Louis, which purchased for its permanent collection the original costume of the King of Solana Beach displays a pair of pale blue jeans.132 This falls in line with Antin’s practice of playing with and inventing history for her characters at a later date. For example, years after performing Being Antinova, Antin created a series of 16mm silent films in From the Archives of Modern Art in 1986 that were supposedly made in the depression era by


Antinova when she fell on hard times after her time with the Ballet Russe in the United States and survived by joining vaudeville and making early films. *The Ballerina and the Poet*, was one of these films and it was set up as a tawdry farce. These films are referred to as a documentary fiction. They were produced after her performance of the aging ballerina so Antin was performing as a younger Antinova when she was older. Antin has stated “All of history is fiction.” In the spirit of this meta-historical intervention, perhaps the king’s jeans are also presented as part of the original costume even though they are not worn in the photographs to play with the idea of how history is created and presented.

Besides Antin pasting a beard to her face, though the rest of her clothes appear to loosely evoke garments worn by royalty in the late sixteenth century, her blue jeans disrupt the time designated by all the other signifiers. This is a king from the twentieth century; a king connected to the fabric of denim and its entire accompanying context linked to mining, westward expansion, and ultimately its appropriation by American stars (both movie and Rock) as the ultimate post-World War II leisure wear. This is the King of Solana Beach. The King escapes the fate of the period-piece costume with the help of the denim. The denim also makes the King more vulnerable to criticism as it confounds the viewer who now cannot read the alter ego as simply a theatrical reenactment of Charles I. The “self” is held accountable for being aware of when it is. Antin’s performance isn’t simply an impersonation or reenactment of King Charles. This figure walks around half in the present and half in the past. This causes a pronounced tension

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and pathos because the King of Solana Beach is a Sisyphean figure who can’t escape his “Loser” status.

Although Antin wore a dark dense beard that matched her long straight dark hair, she did not bind her breasts to create a believable male physique. Antin’s decision not to bind her breasts is provocative. The artist has no interest in “passing” as a man; rather she gallivants around Solana Beach with both secondary sex characteristics. She is a bearded lady, a king with breasts, a woman performing a man’s role with a male title but who holds no actual regal supremacy or authority offering only pomp, exaggerative and anachronistic poses of pageantry that are empty.

In an interview with Rachel Mason for Bomb magazine, Antin reveals her nervousness about going out dressed in drag in an era where white gloves and Easter bonnets were still being worn in the neighboring wealthy town of La Jolla. She recounts a specific moment when a convertible full of young surfers stopped and inquired about who she was. She bowed and introduced herself as the King of Solana beach and asked them if they agreed that Solana beach deserved a king. They seemed satisfied with this answer and exclaimed, “cool” as they sped off, waving at her. This anecdotal evidence which includes juxtaposing formal glove wearing as well as an inquiring, then, approving car-full of surfers offers a glimpse into shifting social norms in the United States at that time. Antin’s cross-dressing performance doesn’t seem to be threatening.

The artist argued that because of her small stature, she was not being read as an intimidating figure. The worst thing that happened was being ignored completely. Her actions themselves weren’t hostile: “I bowed to people, doffed my cap, and kissed ladies’ hands.”\textsuperscript{135} Antin points to her small demeanor in text as well. A 6”x 9” panel accompanied her eight black and white My Kingdom Is the Right Size photographs read: “Solana Beach is a small kingdom but a natural kingdom for no kingdom should extend any further than its king can comfortably walk on any given day. My kingdom is the right size for my short legs.”\textsuperscript{136} This creates a strange justification for the small scale of this king’s domain.

This presentation of the King as a tragicomic figure is present in all of Antin’s selves. The artist has commented on her interest of the concept of “The Loser”. The King character is associated with the historic figure of Charles I, the only monarch of Britain to be beheaded, due to his insistence on the divine right of kings. The King of Solana Beach looks more homeless than regal and tries to hold on to a domain over which he has no control. It is a practice in futility. When one usually invokes a king archetype, it is customarily accompanied by ideas of power and perhaps benevolent authority. But Antin’s performance seems to emphasize the loss of power in a character so delusional, that many of the king’s subjects, who have been photographed interacting with “him,” seem to be mystified and amused by this encounter.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

When certain historic figures are invoked, they are remembered as the doomed “losers” of history. Their violent demise is instantly conjured within Western culture’s memory. Figures such as Nero, Caligula, Marie Antoinette, Mussolini, as well as King Charles I, fit within this category. Though these figures held monarchic positions within great political power structures, they are not synonymous with power or exemplary leadership but rather with megalomania and ill-fated circumstances. By choosing to invoke the specific figure of King Charles I in her performance, Antin has already informed the viewer that this will, inevitably, end badly. One is left to dread the end, and to be apprehensive and aware of the ominous ruin that awaits her character. It is built into the narrative, and is reinforced by history. This tragic irony, in case of the King of Solana Beach is what makes him a “Loser” as one isn’t ever really permitted to anticipate a victory (except for our seemingly delusional King).

Antin states: “I took on the King, who was my male self. As a young feminist I was interested in what would be my male self...he became my political self.” Antin’s political self is impotent, powerless to change anything in the world. This ineffectiveness might also point to the extreme frustration experienced by anyone who was part of the anti-Vietnam War movement, as well as the snail-paced progress experienced by the feminist movement and the civil rights movements. Deciding that her political self must be male and then performing a King with no power punctuates the paradox and absurdity of authority. Through this travesty, Antin produces a character that though clichés of “kingliness” reveals that his delusions of ruling this designated land, or any land, are

futile and vain. If Antin’s King held the same main beliefs as Charles I, that his royal prerogative was sanctioned by god and thus his decisions were always blameless and honorable, one can connect this outlook to the United States’ imperialist attitude towards the Vietnam War. The United States viewed itself as the unquestionable super power and peacekeeper since the end of the Second World War. As the nearly twenty year Vietnam conflict kept raging, claiming hundreds of lives daily with no end in sight, this view began to be questioned by citizens of the United States. The fear of Communism and the domino theory were cited as reasons that required the United States’ involvement in this conflict. In addition, the draft lottery, which discriminated heavily against the poor and the middle class alike, became another point of resentment. The anti-war movement spread across the country as people’s frustrations grew. The self-righteous view that the government had the authority to intervene in and radically alter other countries’ political systems was being harshly judged and condemned.

In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman discusses her concept, temporal drag. When an artist decide to wear clothing that harkens a different era (like Antin’s king outfit), it cannot be read the same way it would when Charles I wore the same clothing. It is the anachronisms of such things, like costuming, affect and character, that Elizabeth Freeman explains, “break the frame” of the 1970’s. This act disrupts the normative usage of these garments as well as actions (like bowing and kissing hands). What was accepted centuries ago, when brought to California in the late twentieth century is altered. These anachronisms are disruptive and make the work

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something other than simple parody. It infused it with allegory; in the clothing of a king (who is male, and from centuries ago) Antin tells the story of Charles I as well as the American experience of the loser during the Vietnam War. This appearance “writes” on the body not only the history of Charles I, but two historically divergent forms and meanings of kingliness and loserliness, so the one comments on the other and “in order to remake the world in a mock-imperialist gesture.” These queer temporalities, Freeman posits, “propose alternate possibilities for living in relation to past, present and future others.”

_Eleanora Antinova_

Antin’s fixation with the notion of the “Loser” is linked to circumstances that lead to helplessness. Eleanora Antinova’s narrative holds the same elements of pathos. The alter ego of Eleanora Antinova was created and enacted by the artist daily for three weeks in October 1980, wherein she would transform into a fictional black, aging ballerina. Her documentation of this performance involved a multitude of media: for those three weeks Antin would alter her skin tone through make-up daily and dressed as she believed a retired dancer would. She performed as Antinova, she produced drawings, she wrote about the character in shifting first to third person and was photographed in different locales around New York City as if candid means were employed, creating the illusion of implicit celebrity. She also had staged photographs taken in 1980 from her supposed

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139 Freeman, _Time Binds_, p. 70.

140 Freeman, _Time Binds_, p. xxii.
performances in her youth, when she was part of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballet Russe in her work *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev 1919-1929*. In these she depicts awkward ballet poses where she depicts herself performing in racially and ethnically reductive roles that exoticized and orientalized her. Because of Antinova’s race, she is limited to roles such as Pocahontas, The Prisoner of Persia, and l’Esclave. The guise of the black aging ballet dancer in a predominantly white vocation conjures, once again, the “Loser.” In this case Antinova, the “Loser”, can be categorized as the underdog who cannot win because of circumstance and social norms which produce inequities that bar her from performing all the roles she desires. This underdog status is what connects a black ballerina to a King in Antin’s performances.

The bulk of the discourse on this specific alter ego focuses on the thorny subject of blackface and points to Antin’s Jewish heritage which connects her to a historical context of Jewish American performers in the early part of the twentieth century. The more serious and sincere the King and the Ballerina appear, the funnier they are. “I always tend to see the funny sides of things. To me, the richest experience is when it’s laughter and tears together. And I know that sounds very Jewish, and perhaps that’s part of the Jewish kind of humor I was brought up with. It’s like endless humor…and at the same time it’s ‘Oy’.”

Two other notable cross-dressing performances from this time is Anna Mendieta’s *Facial Hair Transplant* (1972) and Adrian Piper’s *Mythic Being* (1973), as both artists were informed by the contemporaneous concerns and investigations of the art world.

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141 Pbs.org/art21/images/Eleanor-antin/from-before-the-revolution-1979
Mendieta’s M.A. thesis examination depicts her applying beard hair (Mendieta asked her friend Morty Sklar to shave off his beard and she then used it for this performance) to her face.\textsuperscript{142} Her transformation into a man provocatively questions the very nature of power and privilege through gender. This act of turning the body into an art object was common practice in the seventies. When women engaged in this practice, the interpretations of their actions often led to unbalanced criticism where they were accused of narcissism. These assessments marginalized and feminized work that was assumed to have solely personal connotations. In \textit{Where is Ana Mendieta: Identity, Performativity, and Exile}, Jane Blocker points to the most “egregious” analysis of Mendieta’s work to make her point about this misunderstanding of these acts performed by women, with their own bodies. Donald Kuspit psychoanalyzed Mendieta by looking at her work in which he applies the “most clichéd protocols of psychotherapy.” These gender specific accusations pathologized the artist as narcissistic.\textsuperscript{143} By using such psychoanalytical rhetoric, critics were allowed to ignore the political critique of patriarchal culture that was part of this work. But since Mendieta’s days as a student at the University of Iowa to the time of her death, the artist was an active part of the artistic trends of the 1970’s. Mendieta wasn’t naively making art; rather she was vigorously engaged with the imbalance of power structures by means of body art, performance art, and earth art to examine and provoke “boundaries between artist and audience, male and female, body and spirit.”\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{143} Blocker, \textit{Where is Ana Mendieta}, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{144} Blocker, \textit{Where is Ana Mendieta}, p. 10.
Adrian Piper’s performed *The Mythic Being* starting in September 1973. It involved Piper periodically cross-dressing in a mustache, afro wig, mirrored sunglasses and smoking a cigar. Initially the persona was described as blurring race. This work was made up of performances, black-and-white photographs, posters, and texts. In 1976, Piper identified the Mythic Being as “an anonymous, third world young boy”. Unlike Antin’s invocation of a historical figure, Charles I, Piper described the *Mythic Being* as “a fictitious or abstract personality that is generally part of a story or folktale used to explain or sanctify social or legal institutions or natural phenomena”. Piper wrote in the 1970s about the *Mythic Being* and that people viewed him as they needed to; mostly he brought up shared anxieties involving race, class and gender as well as sexuality. Piper performed as a figure full of smug machismo because that is what is expected of this figure. For example, the artist notes that white women would clutch their handbags tighter. Proof that this figure exposed fears held by American society. This work was mounted in spaces that fell outside what most would consider an art venue. Smith states, that Piper’s audience is largely imaginary, as most viewers were not connected to the art world.

The photographs of this performance depict Piper attacking a white man in a park in *Mythic Being: Getting Back #1* (1975), and checking out women in *The Mythic Being: Cruising for White Women #1* (1975). This aggressive predatory sexuality is

145 John P. Bowles, *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment*, pp. 231.


147 Bowles, *Adrian Piper*, pp. 234.

148 Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others*, pp. 64.
Piper’s way of exposing racism as well as specific misogynistic notions that black women alone struggled with. Through this male persona, Piper is allowed to move through space and conduct herself in new ways. Piper described her behavior changing once the costume was worn: “I swagger, stride, lope, lower my eyebrows, raise my shoulders, sit with my legs wide apart on the subway, so as to accommodate my protruding genitalia.”

Her Afro hairstyle visibly appears to be an unkempt wig and Bowles notes that Judith Wilson identifies this moment as the first instance that an African American artist uses the Afro to examine clichéd notions of physiognomy rather than a sign of essential blackness. The afro has been the most focused upon portion of this figure’s appearance, and critics have posited that it is this specific choice that would cause anxiety and apprehension because the afro was visually aligned with the Black Panthers, identified with black militancy. Bowles posits that Piper’s work is anti-essentialist as she attempts to expose the stereotype and its reductive falsehoods. Racism is universal, states Piper: “It is not an abstract, distanced issue out there that just affects all those other unfortunate people. Racism, begins with you and me, here and now, and consists in our tendency to try to eradicate each other’s singularity through stereotyped conceptualization.” Through this work Piper expressed attraction to both men and women; this represents “queer” practice. Just like Duchamp’s cross-dressing in the

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151 Bowles, *Adrian Piper*, p. 239.

1920’s can be considered to be an engagement in homosexual social visibility, Piper’s written sentiments engage in fluidity in gender and sexuality. This practice is a rejection of the normative heterosexual standards and also follows performance art’s imperatives. The _Mythic Being_ has been created by the society who perceives him as angry. The audience must acknowledge and take responsibility for his creation.

All the cross-dressing performances from the 1970’s that this essay has examined held unambiguous political implications through the new medium, performance art. Performance art demanded of the viewer to participate. Artists from this timeframe are interested in cross-dressing not specifically to question gender, but rather to articulate personas that interrogate the public on broader issues. The performances aren’t really concerned about “passing” as believable men. Smith, in fact asserts that these artists are “decidedly and determinedly unsuccessful at passing.”¹⁵³ In fact the artists from the 1970s take specific actions to assure that their costumes will draw attention to them as clumsy imposters rather than impersonators who expertly perform the other sex. Through these particularities, this narrative distinguishes itself from the 1920’s as well as the 1990’s narratives.

¹⁵³ Smith, _Enacting Others_, p.13.
DIANE TORR: THE ARTIFICE OF MASCULINITY AND ITS PERFORMATIVITY

Diane Torr’s art practice has been immersed in numerous forms of gender investigations through performance since the Scottish artist arrived in New York in the 1970’s. Specifically, opening up a dialogue across presumed sex and gender boundaries has consistently been her primary objective as an artist. This section will critically analyze two of her works, her Drag King Workshop, which began in 1990 and continues to this day but is now called Man for a Day Workshop, and her 1994 performance Happy Jack. As Torr’s oeuvre is exclusively engaged in gender exploration and she has been very prolific, several other works will be taken into account. Contemporaneous discourse and cultural reactions and responses to cross-dressing will be presented throughout this section in order to provide a fuller understanding of Torr’s inquiries and actions, how they relate to concepts of gender that were being proposed academically, as well as why they are relevant to late twentieth-century gender studies.

Besides being associated with cross-dressing, Torr is also known for her participation in the influential feminist, activist group, the Guerilla Girls. Artist Martha Wilson invited Torr to join the group in 1995. The Guerilla Girls sought to expose

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155 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. 171.
institutional inequities as well as the gross underrepresentation of women and minorities within the art world through vitriolic but humorous billboards, posters and stickers. This group was anonymous and all the members wore gorilla masks when making public appearances. They adopted guises of historic female artists from different periods in time. Torr chose Claude Cahun as her Guerilla Girl persona. The Getty Museum bought the Guerilla Girls’ archives; consequently each member’s identity is now a matter of public record. What attracted her to take on the guise as this particular artist was Cahun’s “gender-blending” outsider status, which aligned with Torr’s own in-between status. When she lived in the United States, she was understood as a Scottish artist, but in Scotland people identified her as American. Lesbians consider her to be straight and heterosexuals view her as a lesbian. This constant state of in-betweeness is an element that Torr has spent decades examining in her art.\footnote{Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, pp.168-169.}

Torr’s involvement with feminist issues has been rigorous. She was very familiar with and identified strongly with feminism’s struggle as it challenged traditional historical narratives and sought to establish women as essential figures that had been marginalized in history. As a result she constructed a history, in which women were distinguished for their accomplishments rather than being considered nonessential whose purpose and nature allowed them to solely claim supporting roles. Though she acknowledges the importance of this schema, Torr chose to own history through male performances rather than performing from the position of the vexed casualty who admonishes history for its gross inaccuracies and dismissals. Her male characters perform masculinity through appropriation of the male subject’s idioms linguistic as well as
corporeal. This learned and repeated posturing informs a performance that echoes attitudes obscured by traditional historical writing and reveals a perspective that contains an alternative critical approach in regards to a certain long-standing patriarchal and patronizing mind-sets.¹⁵⁷

These brief revisions conjured by Torr disrupt the self-congratulatory, sycophantic camaraderie of a mono-gendered convention. Any aspect of masculinity and essentialist notion of superiority and dominance that was considered patently obvious and time-honored, Torr zeroed in on. She considered these notions opportunities to highlight and question their righteousness and legitimacy. This institutionalized atmosphere generates and supports romanticized male-bonding narratives, while claiming objectivity, excludes a whole gender, dismissing and conspicuously rendering it invisible and voiceless. This is the idealized institutional fiction that Torr has attempted to tear down.¹⁵⁸ By embodying the misogynist, and creating monologues that so cavalierly and crassly dismiss women, what is revealed to the viewer is the everyday misogyny that permeates language and hence, thought.

Happy Jack—The Jack Spratt Persona

Torr also writes about her interest in interpreting and reiterating elements of her own heritage in her performances and additionally discusses her desire to carve out ownership of cultural history through cross-dressing. This is how the persona of Jack

¹⁵⁷ Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 169.
¹⁵⁸ Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 169.
Sprat came to be. He is an aging man who reminisces over the Mod sub-culture he belonged to in his youth, in mid-1960s Britain. For fifteen minutes Jack Spratt enthusiastically describes in the now outdated colloquial speech of the Mod, his interests and his activities with his mates. He also dances and sings. His attitudes and values are revealed within this time frame as the viewer realizes that this character is obsessed with resuscitating his past glory by means of narrating his youthful exploits. By describing the past, he relives these moments. He lacks the ability to move forward because he is frozen in time. The choice of performing as a Mod is linked to Torr’s own youth and her personal connection to this subculture.159

In 1994, Torr had a residency at the School for New Dance in Amsterdam when she created the character of Jack Sprat. This fifteen-minute monologue performance of Happy Jack was a collaborative project created with Rina Vergano, an old classmate with whom she attended high school in Britain. Vergano was also part of the mod subculture in the 1960s and helped with the co-writing of the mod vernacular.160 Initially this performance was part of Drag Kings and Subjects in 1995; however, it later turned into a stand-alone work, which was performed on its own.161

Torr expressed frustration with the official narrative of this youth culture, made up of working class characters, but later written about by “middle-class intellectuals” and sought to re-insert certain aspects that were being wiped out of existence through the

159 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p.169.
160 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 231.
161 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p.170.
continuous telling of one sanitized version of the story. To add insult to injury she adds that her quotidian activities and interests (and those of all mod girls for that matter) had been neglected or edited out of history, eclipsed by accounts that were focused on the male experience. This oversight caused the extensive violence against female mods perpetrated by male mods to be erased. The female characters in the Mod movement are have often been treated as incidental objects that decorate the back seat of the Vespa (the coveted mode of transportation), subsidiary and minor accessories in an official grand narrative.

Torr divulges this widespread misogyny through her monologues. Two significant remarks underscore these attitudes. Torr’s observations of these circumstances are presented as off-handed remarks made by Jack Spratt. The first showcases what kinds of qualifications were required when choosing a girlfriend. He discusses a relationship he had with a mod girl and explains how her status was based on her shoplifting abilities, which facilitated an enviable record collection for him. He admires this talent as it pertains to him and gleefully describes the material wealth gained. He adds that she was coveted by his mates for these abilities as well.

The second element reveals a broader and more overt misogynistic attitude toward women at large. Jack Spratt describes what he and his friends would do to amuse themselves: sexually harass women who passed by, taunting them. This explicit jeering was aimed to entertain each other thus producing homo-social bonding. Spratt is gleeful and appears wholeheartedly proud of their cleverness as he describes this vulgarity and

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162 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p.169.

aggression. He then becomes vexed when the audience fails to see how uproarious and witty they were.\textsuperscript{164}

Torr compares the costume-like precision of the Mod look to a military uniform, where every aspect of the look was highly stylized and meticulous. Italian shoes were preferred and were kept immaculately shined, special attention was given to haircuts, and parkas were worn by all. Their preferred mode of transportation was the motor scooter that was either a Vespa or a Lambretta. These were custom painted and adorned with weasel’s tails.\textsuperscript{165} This subculture displayed hyper-masculine belligerence, exacerbated by the widespread use of amphetamines, coupled with narcissistic fixation.\textsuperscript{166}

Jack Sprat wears skin-tight black leggings and iconic steel-toe Dr. Marten’s Boots (a wardrobe staple that would be later appropriated by the seventies punk scene in the U.K., as well as the grunge era of the early 1990’s). He also wears a red, white and blue Ben Sherman shirt and his hair is voluminously teased and spiked pointing out in all directions. The skin tight denim leggings he wears, Torr notes, are more of a Punk signifier but she decided that this would be a garment that Jack Sprat would have picked up “on his journey to the 1990’s.”\textsuperscript{167}

At one point in the dialogue, Jack Spratt dances to the Who’s song, “Can’t Explain.” The Who is usually cited as the most influential English band during the mod era. The band was followed fervently by mods and Spratt describes attending their live

\textsuperscript{164} Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, pp. 226, 230.

\textsuperscript{165} Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p.170.

\textsuperscript{166} Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p.172.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
performances and dancing, which he then demonstrates. The dance involves sharply executed karate-like sidekicks, high knee lifts that conclude in the leg kicked out and outstretched and the foot being flexed, accompanied by lots of jumping, and shaking of the head and hips. Though this dance may appear hyperbolic when viewed in a theater, Torr insists that this is, in fact, how mods danced; with a bombastic bravado supported by exaggerated moves. The artist states that she didn’t add any embellishments to this masculine exhibitionism.168

Spratt eagerly describes his youth to the audience as a non-stop escapade where music genres like the blues, ska, blue beat, and rhythm-and-blues, unknown to the mainstream and discovered by the mods via the proliferation of pirate radio, were the prized resources that helped that value system run and were regarded as esoteric knowledge for the few in the know.169 Torr states that this interest in African American and Jamaican music had also been absent from the narrative. Jack Spratt casually brings up his pride in going to house parties where he and his mates are the only white people there. This is Torr’s way of positioning black music’s significance within the Mod subculture.170

One of the dominant themes examined in Happy Jack involves nostalgia for a bygone time; the alter ego’s halcyon days have sadly disappeared. This faded glory evokes a pitiable, but not wholly unlikeable picture of a character that is incapable of adapting to change. This specific property of this character brings to mind Antin’s King

168 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, pp. 171-172.
169 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 173.
170 Ibid.
of Solana Beach and the concept of the loser. Both characters attempt to create a façade that generates confidence and assuredness in regards to their social station. The king is photographed asking his subjects about their well-being and even has a drink with the masses. These acts are met by a bemused audience. Jack Spratt himself seems to be unaware that he is a figure of loneliness, wedged in a past time and space through his outfit and choices of music while the rest of the world has moved on. Though he physically ages, he is in denial about the meta-mod world and his status of being viewed as a walking anachronism.

Stephen Bottoms critiques Torr’s Happy Jack performance in Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance and identifies the Jack Spratt character as the artist’s most identifiable drag king type. He points to Jack Spratt’s social class and how employing working-class figures is considered common practice within drag king performances, such as “grease monkeys, cowboys and blue collar studs.”171 This preference has been explained as enabling something more dramatic and amusing versus a performance portraying the “natural” masculinity of a higher class. The prospect of representing dominant masculinity is viewed as dull by most Drag King performers.172

Performed stereotypes, Halberstam explains, are not intrinsically right or wrong, rather they present certain quickly identifiable characteristics of a social group in contrast and in relation to other social groups. Though mostly perceived as a “pejorative mode of representation,” because of its reductive properties, they may also be utilized as an ideological tool. To paraphrase Halberstam, and apply her ideas about performed

171 Bottoms. Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 190.

172 Ibid.
stereotypes by masculine women in film to drag kings performing as working class characters, white middle-class forms of masculinity occupy a cultural norm thus non-white as well as working class masculinities are measured as excessive and in relation to the norm.173

Bottoms gets to the core of the critical pitfalls that are created when this common trope is employed. There is the problematic presence of the middle-class performer ridiculing the powerless working-class by parodying it through reductive ethnic stereotypes with the purpose of inducing a cheap laugh. The Happy Jack performance, though amusing because of its crassness is also tuned into portraying “protest masculinity,” a term sociologist R.W. Connell used to conceptualize a trend he identified in disenfranchised young men. This consists of an exaggerated display of masculine conventions. This is a response to powerlessness and a “Claim to power where there are no real resources for power.”174 This embodied Mod character reveals ugly little truths about the British male working class mind-set in the mid-1960s that would be impossible to become aware of by simply studying photographic images of Mods immortalized in fashion history textbooks. Whatever the artist perceives as having been swept under the rug in terms of history is resurrected and demonstrated by means of performance. Torr has handled this character responsibly; she is concerned with authenticity, such as Spratt’s choice of language, his dance moves, and the choice of music he admires; yet the character doesn’t emerge from a time capsule, unscathed by all the decades that have passed. His trousers and hair have been influenced by the passing of time and the ensuing

173 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, p. 180.
174 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 190
counter-culture movements that came after the mods. Torr is acutely aware of time and how it has taken its toll on Spratt. Torr knows that just as an all-good hero character would hold no critical truths, neither would a villain. There is the finely tuned sense of character development; the artist takes care not to create an abominable character. She has created a persona who offers us an unflinching, barbed, and critical recollection of cultural history. Jack Spratt’s greatest vulnerability is that he is stuck in the past points to the fact that he really has no future to look forward to.

The Drag King Workshop

In 1990 Torr began the Drag King Workshop in collaboration with Johnny Science, one of the first well known female-to-male transsexuals in the New York club scene, a musician and make-up artist. The goal of this workshop was and is “passing” for a man. These activities are closely linked to Torr’s many gender related investigations of the 1980’s East Village performance scene. Torr still runs the workshop without Science. It has been renamed the Man for a Day Workshop. It has toured in many parts of the world, conveying and proliferating Torr’s gender queries and investigations through performance to and for an international audience.

A drag king is a female performer who dresses as a male character and performs various actions that are characterized by society as masculine on a stage. However, different scholars have created and instituted very narrow definitions with varied qualifications and restrictions that may exclude certain performances from being

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175 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 26.

176 Bottoms Sex, Drag and Male Roles, p. 2.
identified as drag king performances. The origin of the term “Drag King” is contested. Johnny Science maintains that he is the one who coined the term.\textsuperscript{177} Shelly Mars performed in drag since the mid-1980’s in San Francisco at the Baybrick Inn.\textsuperscript{178} The Bay area scene took off as Leigh Crow’s performance of “Elvis Herselvis” became very popular in the 1990s and she started calling herself a drag king. Bottoms asserts that there is no reason for disagreement and that the most plausible explanation is that the term has two separate points of origin.\textsuperscript{179} However, it wasn’t until May 1994, two years after New York’s first Drag King Ball that San Francisco had its own official drag king Competition, hosted by Crow.\textsuperscript{180} In 1995, journalist Amy Linn stated that many traced the “modern, American usage of drag king to Torr and Science, in a major cover story written for the \textit{SF Weekly}. By then they had made numerous national television appearances and Frances Williams, writing for the \textit{Independent} in England, pointed out that only after the workshop was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Britain’s first drag king contest was held at the national film theatre for the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.\textsuperscript{181}

Science’s Drag King Workshop in 1990, which was held in artist Annie Sprinkle’s salon, consisted of women wearing men’s clothes and Science applying makeup to create five o’clock shadows and a variety of facial hair styles. After viewing

\textsuperscript{177} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{178} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, pp. 27, 118.

\textsuperscript{179} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{180} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{181} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p. 27.
this workshop, Torr felt that she could contribute to the workshop by adding another dimension to these transformations that were, at that time, largely cosmetic and surface interventions. She sought to collaborate with Science. Her suggested additions were based on her background in performance and dance; Torr proposed that she supply a focus on physical presentation. The questions that concerned Torr were many, such as: “How and why does a man walk, stand up or sit the way he does? And in what ways does he take up space and interact that is divergent from femininity?”\textsuperscript{182} These questions had to be confronted and examined to bring about an understanding about the performance of masculinity and its teachability. By focusing on masculinity, and achieving it through gestures and movements, one could reach the conclusion that this concept, believed to be essential to maleness, was in fact learned and performed.

The one day workshop initially ran three or four times a year at Sprinkle’s salon and the participants would first get into their costumes and their makeup while they were urged to think about the characters they wanted to become. While Science worked on each participant’s make-up individually, they were sent out to observe men and note details of behavior and movement. Character development was then worked on, such as the persona’s name, social class, values sexual orientation, profession etc. When everyone’s appearance had been finalized, Torr would discuss and demonstrate how one could go about “becoming” a man through character work and physical training. The final step was trying to “pass” as a man in public. The group would attempt to enter areas that were traditionally considered “male-only spaces,” such as strip clubs.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{182} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{183} Bottoms \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, pp.99.
Science and Torr had different concerns and aesthetic priorities, which in the end caused the dissolution of their collaboration. For Science “passing” in the public sphere was not important while Torr felt that this was the whole point of the workshop. Torr wanted the participants to achieve a level of realism and Science aimed for exaggerative theatrical elements, for example, enormous sideburns or gigantic mustaches were preferred even if they reached comedic proportions. This schism in aesthetics can also be found in drag king culture and has been a point of contention for gender studies scholars as well. Some believe that the tradition of drag performance is not about passing but about presenting and performing over-the-top masculinity in a comedic way. Torr sought a more profound experience. She believed that this wasn’t just dress-up. By “passing” for a man, she believed that the participants would actually experience a shift in power. Their cross-dressed body, now armed with a new language, would send out messages of authority and this would consequently cause an altogether new reception. Torr believed that this could be a life-altering experience.

The Release Technique and its Influences on Movement, Gesture, and Thought

In 1974, after having studied sociology and developing a deep interest in Marxist theories she enrolled in a dance and theatre course at Dartington College of Arts. Torr graduated from Dartington College in England and moved to New York to study dance at the Cunningham studios in 1976. She studied under Mary Fulkerson who taught the

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184 Bottoms *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, pp.105.
185 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, pp. 42, 44.
186 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. 271.
“Release” technique, a non-hierarchical approach that prompted the dancer to re-evaluate the notion of viewing oneself as a technician who follows a standardized kinetic language, which would stifle the dancer from reaching her own method of inquiry and expression. Rather, the Release technique suggested that the dancer should regard oneself an artist who creates “dance works” by developing personalized vocabularies of movement. Instead of relying on the flat reflection of the studio mirror for perfecting technique and negotiating space, a three-dimensional awareness was encouraged which in turn would develop a more robust understanding of the body as a physical mass moving through space and how it is affected by gravitational forces.\(^{187}\)

This non-traditional and unorthodox dance education she received seems to have equipped Torr with fundamentally new modes of critical thinking regarding the purpose and agency of the dancer. She honed in on the limitless possibilities and protean properties of identity negotiated by means of the body and asked difficult and unpopular questions. Her inquiries can be located in her groundbreaking performances where she anarchically refuses any convention to be placed and imposed on her performing body. She consistently suggested unmapped and unrealized ways of experiencing gender; whether it is female, androgynous or male, and plotted an alternate course where the gendered body can negotiate its terms of being. This endowed her with a self-assured sense of autonomy and it allowed Torr to define the terms of her own practice. It further allowed her to investigate the cultural and historical self, manifested through the body.

\(^{187}\) Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, pp. 44-45.
Ultimately, Science was most interested in cultivating a sense of community and arranging social opportunities for drag kings. Torr was most concerned with emphasizing and performing learned behavioral traits, which were assumed to be essential to each sex. The workshop was a platform to showcase the non-natural properties of masculinity, which could be learned. If they could be reproduced plausibly, it would point to gender being a construct. In May 1992, Science organized the first Drag King Ball at the Crow Bar and featured the first drag king contest in New York. This event was widely publicized. Its notoriety and spectacular nature brought attention for the workshop as well. In April 1993 Torr and Science were invited to Boston’s Institute for Contemporary Art to give their drag king workshop.

Torr developed the kinetic argot legible and applicable to female-to-male drag performances, slowly establishing it as the Lingua Franca of performing masculinity as Torr’s workshops are taught internationally. Furthermore, drag kings who are considered to be determining figures in the drag king culture and its proliferation can all be traced back to Torr’s seminar. Torr also assembled a theoretical structure that accompanied and supported each movement taught in the workshop, meant to transform woman into man for a day. She infused purpose to every move with her astute observations that elucidated and deconstructed how power is maintained through these gestures and poses.

Torr positioned the drag king performance onto the fine arts platform. What could have been considered to be a type of isolated performance void of critical qualities, left to the confines of the cabaret show or the lesbian bar scene, meant solely to entertain and

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188 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. 113.
189 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. 114.
provide spectacle, Torr shrewdly re-articulated. She embodied the artifice of masculinity and its non-essential nature and submitted these investigations via performance art. Torr did not remove her characters from the cabaret venue to place them exclusively into the art world though. They, these characters, move freely between both sites, fluidly existing in both. Her continuous interactions with established art movements in different guises as well as the lesbian bar scene, showcase her commitment to in-between-ness. For example, Torr participated in *Pissing Contest #1* as Angus McTavish, part of Nam Jun Paik’s Fluxus piece *Fluxus Champion Contest*, as realized by Larry Miller at the James Cohan Gallery in New York City in April 2007. Originally presented in 1963, five men assemble, unzip their trousers and urinate into a white pail while singing their respective country’s national anthem; whoever pees for the longest amount of time, wins. Torr won the contest using an “urinelle” (a funnel-like apparatus sold for camping trips) to direct her urine into the bucket.\textsuperscript{190} This participation levels and broadens the parameters of gender as well as art.

*Feminist and Lesbian Controversy*

It is perhaps difficult to imagine the existing enmity Torr’s gender investigations would merit by feminists. Her gender-bending experimentation was rejected within the lesbian community. This ideological aggression was also directed more generally toward the Trans community, which would be identified as an enemy of feminism’s struggles. Torr’s concept of a female to male transvestite, Drag King, Impersonator and/or

\textsuperscript{190} Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. xi.
transsexual was misunderstood and looked upon with contempt. Even butch lesbians sometimes faced condemnation by feminists when their choice of appearance and demeanor was considered too masculine, and likewise identifying them as “traitors” of the cause. Even within the feminist community binary understandings of gender continued to lead to heated misinterpretations and accusations. When Brandon Teena was murdered in Nebraska in 1993, Donna Minkowitz’s article in the *Village Voice* identified Teena as a self-loathing lesbian and deduced that her inability to come to terms with her lesbianism had driven her to dress as a man, as this would be the only way she could have sexual relationships with women. It took the director of the gay and lesbian advocacy group, Human Rights Campaign, until 1999 to propose that transgendered people might also be included in their mission statement.191

An example of the hostility the Trans community faced by feminists can be located in the 1979 *The Transsexual Empire* by Janice Raymond, which posited an essentialist argument stating that only a person born female could truly be considered a genuine specimen of womanhood. Raymond claimed that all transsexuals reduced the female body to an object; in essence, the rape of the female body was occurring by means of appropriation. She made no comments on female to male transitions. Though Raymond’s book represented a very particular instant in feminist history, this point of view was widely shared by most female academics and persisted all the way to 1991, states Sandy Stone, author of *The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto (1991)*. Stone was accused by Raymond of being an “infiltrator of the feminist

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191 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, pp.102-103.
community.” In 1992 Leslie Feinberg’s pamphlet Transgender Liberation: An Idea Whose Time Has Come, a definition was laid out for the term transgender; it was used as the aegis under which cross-dressers, transvestites, and transsexuals could identify and articulate themselves. This definition also, most inventively, included all in-betweeness; any individual who refused to identify with one gender or the other could also find a place under the aegis of this term.

Garber notes that within the transvestite-transsexual community, there is a belief held that clinical distinctions are divisive. As a result they maintain the desire to be viewed as a singular minority group. The term cross-dresser is preferred, which suggests a lifestyle choice rather than the term transvestite, which they locate within medical discourses that established the practice as a compulsive disorder.

The drag and trans community was so familiar with this feminist anti-trans sentiment that they staged a fake protest at the drag king club Klubstitute in San Francisco in the 1990’s where fake feminists played by drag queens disrupted the drag king show with slogans and picket signs that read “Sisterhood, not Misterhood,” “Fems against Macho Butch Privilege,” and “Wigs Not Pigs.”

In the 1980’s any gender investigation that didn’t follow the official feminist rhetoric was treated with extreme suspicion and at times, violence. Torr’s performance

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192 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, pp. 91.
193 Bottoms, Sex, Drag and Male Roles, pp. 91.
piece “WOW–a-GoGo” at the second annual WOW (Woman’s One World) Theatre Festival held in the East Village and later in Amsterdam clearly illustrates the general frame of feminists’ mind. The WOW Theatre Festival was an event open only to a female audience. Torr was invited to create a performance, fully aware that she would be performing in front of women exclusively. The artist worked as a go-go dancer at this time. This was a time period where feminist writings, such as Andrea Dworkin’s *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) described pornography, stripping and any type of sex-work as anti-feminist. Torr found Dworkin’s position disempowering and believed that it mislabeled all sex workers as victims. This literature she was reading felt reductive and misogynistic to Torr, who believed that economic factors were being conveniently left out of the conversation. When she was invited to perform at WOW, she decided she wanted to investigate sex-work and dancing in front of an all female audience. If men were taken out of the equation, how would the women experience eroticism in this performance? Torr performed a go-go dancing routine accompanied by three monologues. She recruited two other dancers from her workplace, Rebecca Furious and Daisy Mae. Each performer danced first and then discussed a topic that interested them. Rebecca Furious, a Chilean immigrant described how she marries a man to get away from her overbearing family but soon realized that he was a thug and a criminal. She found herself working twelve hours a day as a stripper to avoid being home with him. She funneled all her fear into her dance routines where she conjured fierce heroic women, such as pistol-twirling cowgirls as well as haughty femme-fatales. Daisy Mae

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196 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p.56.

197 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p. 50.
addressed the audience and confessed to her Mennonite mother (who was not in the audience) that she stole her white negligee and panties. She went on to explain that her dream of being a dancer in musical theatre had failed and that she very quickly found out that the stolen negligee was not what men wanted to look at in strip clubs. Essentially Daisy Mae reveals defeat and disappointment. Torr started off her performance in a 1950’s gown with a full skirt and long opera gloves and danced to swing music. Then, she stripped down to a sequined and fringed g-string and bra and danced with a feather fan. Torr began this investigation with a glamorous gown to discuss glamour as a covert facet of sexuality that is celebrated publicly and is positioned on the covers of fashion magazines. Her costume change then revealed the contempt of overt expressions of this same sexuality. Torr wanted to reveal the contempt feminists felt towards sex workers who treated them like objects as well.\footnote{Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, pp.56-57.}

When Torr performed a go-go piece in Amsterdam at the International Women’s Festival at the Melkweg in 1982, she was met by a most violent reaction. She worked with two different dancers for this piece called \textit{Show}. When the performance began so did the booing. They were called fascists, and bottles were flung at them. The performance was cut short when the crowd started pouring onto the stage. The performers had to run away from the angry mob in fear for their lives. This experience forced Torr to accept how explosive the topic of female sexual expression could be and that what had been considered a “safe” feminized space was perceived as being desecrated by the go-go performance.\footnote{Bottoms, \textit{Sex, Drag and Male Roles}, p.60.}
Contemporaneous Discourse

In 1990 Judith Butler’s groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* was published. Many of Torr’s investigations can be viewed as manifestations of Butler’s writing on gender, which was a radical break from mainstream thought. She states that even if society believes that there are only two sexes, there still would be “no reason to assume that genders ought to remain as two.” Gender, according to Butler, can be viewed as a “politically neutral surface on which culture acts” and by stating that she concluded then that it is *culture* that is destiny and not biology. The expectations of how one performs one’s gender are defined and regulated by the culture in which one is raised, a fact that renders it a subjective and shifting phenomenon. Gender depends on context for its arrangement; it is not innate. Though it appears to be a naturalized concept that is essential to one’s sex, it is best understood as a relation rather than an individual attribute. This leads Butler to the question of whether we *have* a gender or *are* a gender.

Butler critically analyzes Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement, “one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one,” and conceives of the body as an instrument where cultural meaning is inscribed. This is how gender constructs the body.

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Regulatory ideals of how one should carry oneself are set forth as norms, which cause desire and idealization. These maintain the status quo and thus, the regulatory fiction of gender persists. Repetitive and ritualistic learned acts are referred to as performativity. Its effects then are achieved through “the naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration”; hence, gendered behavior is taught through this repetition, as performativity should not be mistaken for a singular act.

When addressing drag performances, Butler only discusses male to female drag. This may be explained by the fact that drag kings were not a prevalent cultural form in the early 1990’s. The author discusses the cultural practices of drag and cross-dressing as well as butch/femme identities, which parody the notion of an original gender identity. She points to feminist writings that claim that these identities are degrading to women that promote sex-role stereotyping. She reframes these actions by claiming that there are in fact, three dimensions of corporeality that should be recognized. Anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. Butler states “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself”

Butler asks what kind of subversive repetition could scrutinize the regulatory practice of identity since repetition is the mechanism that in effect reproduces identity within culture. She concludes that “If there is no recourse to a person, a sex, or a

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205 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 185.


208 Ibid.
sexuality that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts for us, what constitutes the possibility of effective inversion, subversion, or displacement within the terms of a constructed identity? What possibilities exist by virtue of the constructed character of sex and gender?” 209

In Judith Jack Halberstam’s 1998 work *Female Masculinity*, the author analyzes Torr’s workshop. Halberstam has formulated a very specific definition of what drag kings are and claims that Torr’s workshop cannot be categorized as drag performance.210 The author offers up a distinction between drag kings and male impersonators. A drag king, Halberstam posits, “is a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume,” and is a recent phenomenon.211 While male impersonation is categorized as a two hundred year theatrical genre with very different objectives. The impersonator’s goal involves “a plausible performance of maleness as the whole of her act,” while the drag king performs masculinity in a way that exposes the artificial and non-essential properties of it, often times through parody. 212

Scholars have traced the word “drag” back to the 1850s applied to stage actors playing female roles as well as young men who dressed in women’s clothing. Male impersonation can be traced back to the restoration stage, where women took up “trouser roles,” which were said to actually emphasize femininity. These “breeches roles,” became

209 Butler *Gender Trouble*, p. 44.


211 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 232.

212 Ibid.
so popular that between 1660 and 1700 one in four plays produced in London were specifically written with roles for women to perform male characters. These roles involved the portrayal of a boyish role and never that of a mature man. These actresses enjoyed great popularity, accumulated a huge female fan base, and received critical accolades. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, gender identification became more rigid and binary. These roles fell rapidly out of favor and critics changed their tune. Female actors, such as Peg Woffington, who once were praised for playing male roles better than men began to suffer “posthumous recastings” of their achievements. Lawrence Senelick in his history of theatrical drag, *The Changing Room*, goes so far as to explain this new trend by claiming that the shift in theatrical taste veered towards a greater realism and that women were only considered convincing when playing men’s roles until that point because of a highly stylized way of acting that consisted of “mere congeries of gesture and pose” that were interpreted as signs of masculinity. Bottoms questions Senelick’s dismissive position by asking how gender is ever presented onstage and what acting is other than gestures and poses. Senelick presumes that masculinity is essential and it presides in a space inaccessible to women. But this notion in itself is a historical construction that dates from around the end of the eighteenth century, as Dror Wahrman reveals in *The Making of the Modern Self*. Though a limited number of male impersonators have been located between the 1930’s and 1960’s, no drag king culture existed in lesbian bar culture. Its popularity exploded onto the scene only in the 1990s.

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213 Bottoms, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, p.11.

214 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p. 233

215 Bottoms *Sex, Drag and Male Roles*, pp. 11-13.
Halberstam discusses the assumption presented in culture and mass media that masculinity is non-performative, how this idea is promoted and who stands to gain from this credo. She states that if masculinity is an essential element exclusively owned by maleness, then it may not be performed or impersonated credibly by anyone of the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{216}

Diane Torr’s pioneering work reflects radical gender theory development that was being articulated academically in the end of the twentieth century. Her background on the Release technique armed her with a profound connection to the body as well as a radical critical thought process on how to approach and interrogate taboo topics such as sex work, androgyny, the performativity of gender, as well as how to question, confront and revise canonical historic narratives. Her constant inquiries on how gender is produced by means of performance were often times conjured up under very hostile cultural and academic environments. Torr became a kinetic scholar and an authority of masculinity and its performance. By cross-dressing, she embodied Butler’s theory on performativity. The relevance and pioneering character of her work has yet to be fully appreciated.

\textsuperscript{216} Halberstam, \textit{Female Masculinity}, p. 235.
CONCLUSION

Cross-dressing has effectively symbolized multiple concepts through the twentieth century. This essay has attempted to present, through the use of these different case studies, each artist’s respective engagement with contemporaneous events and discourses tackled through cross-dressing. The artists discussed in this essay each employed cross-dressing with the purpose of articulating concerns that ranged in theme and content. By identifying the figure of the cross-dresser as a trope, and then presenting and describing four different artists’ practice involved with it, I have demonstrated its’ distinct and multitudinous meanings and located cross-dressing as the nexus of these investigations. Their sartorial interventions gave form to these changing attitudes and embodied disruption, underscoring their distinct preoccupations linked with their time functioning as barometers of shifting attitudes.

Marcel Duchamp set this investigation of cross-dressing in the 20th century in motion. The advent of his photographed embodied alter-ego provided this theme with institutional respect. This recognition allowed other (mostly male) artists to employ this trope throughout the twentieth century and to nod at Duchamp’s shamanistic implications. Duchamp’s contemporary, Claude Cahun, wrote about androgyny and inversion, informed by symbolist tropes and contemporaneous theories on homosexuality. She performed in experimental theatre in drag, and depicted herself in
menswear and cropped hair in her photographic self-portraits and her interest in impersonation can even be observed in the way she chose to resist the Nazi occupiers in the island of Jersey. Eleanor Antin was engaged with conceptual and performance art and this essay focused on her female-to-male performance, *The King of Solana Beach*. Her cross-dressing engaged with the concept of the loser, and can be connected to the Vietnam War. The final artist this essay investigated is Diane Torr and her performances on gender that spanned the 1970s to the 1990s. Torr created a kinetic lingua franca now used by drag kings all over the world as well as revealed the artifice of gender at the same time Judith Butler was writing about this concept in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*.

The cross-dressed body can be thought of as a clothed surface that articulates fluidity and challenges fixedness. The figure of the cross-dresser manifests protean multi-purpose qualities which allow any binary system to be questioned by proposing a disruptive conceptual thirdness. Herein lies the power of cross-dressing; it transcends gender-bending and aims for all manner of interference with the additional element and goal of shedding light on any rigid conventions.

This trans-disciplinary scope is utilized to generate a macroscopic and robust outlook informed by the on-going multivalent ferment of numerous discourses which provides this topic with relevance and depth. Their work is surrounded by its respective contemporaneous circumstances to establish contextual markers that will aid in establishing the shifts outside of the art world and how these external adjustments and shifts in attitude have had a role in transforming the discourse of androgyny at-large.
The intellectual ferment cross-dressing caused in the twentieth century was persistent but what new and original meanings will emerge from it in the twenty first century? What role will it play as new events, legislation, and theories on identity develop and unfold? Though it consistently announced fluidity and asserted itself as a method of intervention in the twentieth century, new narratives might be produced where cross-dressing might lose its impact as a trope of refusal. It is difficult to imagine cross-dressing becoming a banal and impotent theme rather than endurably referring to ambivalence and constant flux within identity but as new traditions emerge and mold society’s perspective and these theories are disseminated, cross-dressing’s meaning may acquire altogether new and unimaginable territories. Unforeseeable authorities might emerge and attempt to redefine and create new typologies in cross-dressing. Artists will be there to appropriate, intervene and interrogate them.

In 2014, Facebook, the online social network offered an expanded range of gender choices to their followers. Fifty choices were made available as opposed to the binary male/female choice given when the network first began. 2014 is also the year that Austrian transgender performer, Conchita Wurst, won the annual Eurovision music competition, wearing a sequined gown accompanied by false eye lashes and a well-groomed beard and moustache. Are all these events in popular culture indicative of a society all set to embrace cross-dressing as a socially established practice? If so, what place will it hold in art? Do these events neutralize the power and meanings it held in the twentieth century? Will it become a depoliticized act, powerless to position itself against rigidity or will it endurably refer to ambivalence and constant flux within identity?
Before one becomes too optimistic and proclaims 2014 the year of pan-gender acceptance, certain events have caused a hostile atmosphere for cross-dressing once more. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin made “promoting non-traditional lifestyles” illegal in 2013, and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed an order stating that transsexuals, transgendered people as well as cross-dressers could be restricted from getting a driver’s license as they are considered to have a “mental disorder.” These facts allow one to posit that the anxiety surrounding sexual orientation, gender and cross-dressing is still present. Cross-dressing still leaves many unsettled as it points to the incompatibility of conformity and freedom. In response to these legislative restrictions, German drag queen and DJ Barbie Breakout staged a protest on video where she sewed her mouth shut. The historically recurrent fascination with cross-dressing in society doesn’t seem to be fading. These artists used their bodies as the vehicle to push boundaries. This space allowed them to make inquiries and critiques, interventions and protestations which have long reaching effect on institutional, psychological, philosophical as well as political issues.


REFERENCES


FIGURES
1. Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy. Photo by Man Ray, 1921.
5. Eleanor Antin, Portrait of the King, 1972, black and White photograph mounted on board; 13 ¾ x 9 ¾
6. Original costume worn by Eleanor Antin as King of Solano Beach, 1972-1974, purchased by Kemper Museum, Washington University, St. Louis.
7. Eleanor Antin, The King of Solana Beach, 1974-75, 6”x 9”