

Copyright  
by  
Je Hye Kim  
2007

**The Dissertation Committee for Je Hye Kim Certifies that this is the approved  
version of the following dissertation:**

**Performing Female Masculinities at the Intersections of Gender, Class,  
Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality**

**Committee:**

---

Jill Dolan, Supervisor

---

Joni/Omi Jones

---

Mary Kearney

---

Deborah Paredez

---

Stacy Wolf

**Performing Female Masculinities at the Intersections of Gender, Class,  
Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality**

**by**

**Je Hye Kim, B.S.; M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December, 2007**

## **Dedication**

This work is lovingly dedicated to my dearest mentor,

Jill Dolan,

who opened a new path for me and affectionately guided my journey along it.

This work is also dedicated to all female-born genderqueers of color in honor of their  
courage and struggles.

## Acknowledgements

Jill Dolan is deserving of my heartfelt thanks for her amazing mentorship and instruction during my study in the Performance as Public Practice program at UT Austin. I deeply appreciate her incredible support and generosity. Her brilliant comments and thought-provoking questions have inspired, guided, and nurtured my critical thinking for this dissertation project. It has been a huge honor and tremendous pleasure for me to work with her.

I am very grateful to my fabulous committee: Joni/Omi Jones, Mary Kearney, Deborah Paredez, and Stacy Wolf. My work has benefited from their wonderful teaching and useful suggestions as well as their encouragement. I would also like to express my appreciation to the faculty of the Performance as Public Practice program for providing me with scholarships and work positions for the past five years.

My mother's constant and devoted prayers for my success, as well as her financial support, has enabled me to finish my project. Although my father cannot celebrate my achievement with me because he passed away during the writing of this document, I do know that my father's spirit has protected and blessed me during my writing. I truly thank my parents for their eternal love for me. My spiritual advisor and extended family-member Hyunkyung has brought beauty and peace in my life and fed my soul with her wisdom and compassion whenever things were tough for me.

I am indebted to Zachary Dorsey's committed help throughout my revising and editing process. He has read every word of this dissertation and given me smart advice and pointed comments. Furthermore, I owe much for his friendship and tireless emotional support that kept me sane and comforted my heart. Because I had him as a

caring friend and an engaged interlocutor, I was able to complete this project. I cannot thank him enough for his generosity, teaching on writing, and invaluable contribution to my project.

Without many genderqueer performers' help and cooperation, my research would have been impossible. I wish to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to kt shorb, D'Lo, Sand Chang, Karen Rothstein (Xavier Onasis), Cody Las Vegas, Mel Corn (Jake Danger), Kit Kat (Katie Heim), and Sile Singleton. They kindly responded to my interviews and shared their works and thoughts with me. Our engaged dialogues enriched my project in countless ways. Ana-Maurine Lara closely read a part of my dissertation and provided me astute and meticulous comments and insightful suggestions, for which I am thankful. I also thank Heidi Madsen (Toe B) and Allison Stelly (Cherry Poppins) for offering me visual material, and to Neeve for sharing her work with me.

Finally, I would like to thank the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation for their financial aid and interest in my project. I am honored to be a recipient of the 2007 Woodrow Wilson Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship in Women's Studies.

**Performing Female Masculinities at the Intersections of Gender, Class,  
Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Je Hye Kim, Ph. D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2007

Supervisor: Jill Dolan

This dissertation explores how female-born or female-bodied gender variants perform and represent their masculinities in American performance art and drag king shows. A drag king refers to a woman or female-born person who performs their gender as fluid, usually wearing masculine costumes and make-up. I focus on how race, ethnicity, and class are involved in performing female masculinities on stage, and how the intersections of other social vectors produce myriad differences in terms of stakes, styles, and forms of masculinity. I examine how female-born queer performers foreground the constructed nature of masculinity, and how they redefine established categories of gender and sexuality through performance. I argue that queer

performances of female masculinities deconstruct the heteronormative gender binary and embody alternative configurations of sex, gender, class, race, and sexuality.

In my first chapter, I address Peggy Shaw's *Menopausal Gentleman* (1997) and *To My Chagrin* (2003). I examine how she portrays aging white butch masculinity, sexuality, and emotion, through the reinterpretation of menopause and musings on her own whiteness. My second chapter provides a critical reading of kt shorb's [sic] *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* (2005) and D'Lo's *Ramble-Ations* (2006). Investigating the effeminization of Asian masculinity and multicultural racial performativity, I illuminate how Asian-American female masculinities are differently constituted in the interplay between class, ethnicity, diaspora, and cultural identities. In my third chapter, I analyze the 6<sup>th</sup> (Chicago, 2004) and 8<sup>th</sup> (Austin, 2006) International Drag King Extravaganza showcase performances. I describe how they reveal the theatrical nature of masculinity, and how they mark race, class, and ethnicity. In addition, I discuss how they valorize gender fluidity and multiplicity, staging queer desire and pleasure.

Throughout this dissertation, by offering complex illustrations of masculine genders of the female body or the gender-ambiguous body, I contend that female-born gender variants disrupt the equation of masculinity to maleness through their theatrical performances of masculinities. I conclude that performing female masculinities can foster the critical artfulness of gender by engaging in social criticism of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Performing Aging White Butchness .....	25
Chapter 2: Queering Asian Female Masculinities .....	85
Chapter 3: Performing Queer Genders in Drag King Shows.....	196
Conclusion: Toward the Critical Artfulness of Gender .....	259
Bibliography .....	274
Vita.....	287

## Introduction

Alternative masculinities, ultimately, will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent to which they fail to be feminist, antiracist, and queer.

—Judith Halberstam (1998: 173)

In April of 2007, I attended the first session of a swing dance class at UT Austin, right after Seung-Hee Cho's massive shooting at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. I was the only Asian in the room (and the only person who did not conform to gender norms), and most members of the class were white men and women. To begin the class, the white female instructor asked the class to stand in separate rows: male leaders in the left and female followers in the right. While people were finding their "proper" gender line, I broke the silence by asking the instructor, "Can I stand in the men's line?" and immediately, all class members looked at me, an aberrant troublemaker. Slightly embarrassed by my question, the instructor replied, "You want to be a leader? Are you sure? . . . OK. You can do that." When the instructor asked the class to make pairs, things became even more awkward. All the women in the class perceived me as invisible, intentionally ignoring my presence without making eye contact with me. A gender freak – or a potentially dangerous Asian – I was ultimately left alone without a partner (female follower).

When I got home that night, I contemplated why the women in the class avoided having me as their partner. At the time, due to the shock from the tragedy at Virginia Tech, the previously long-held image of Asian men as compliant and meek was instantly

upset, and the fear and threat of the Asian body was heightened. Accordingly, the Asian body was suddenly rendered hyper-visible. My gender-ambiguous Asian body might have been haunted by the fear of Cho's psychopathic danger and cruelty in the swing dance class. In fact, after Cho's incident, I suffered from an extreme fear for a while that people might read me as an Asian man, and that a mentally unstable and racist student on campus might target me to even up the score. As I worked alone until late at night in the office of my department building, my fear increased. Since many in America believe that in general, Asian men are small and effeminate, it was possible that I might inadvertently pass as an "Asian" man through my non-conforming gender display. After the tragedy at Virginia Tech, whenever I saw a feminine Asian woman performing "appropriate" gender in the streets and on campus, it felt like her feminine gender practice – long hair, make-up, wearing a skirt, modest demeanor – was a sort of protective armor in contrast with the vulnerability of my non-conventional gender embodiment. I envied their security in the midst of the precarious circumstances. What was more surprising is that I found myself taking a second or third look at passing Asian male students on campus, internalizing the potential threat of Asian men's criminality that the mainstream media had manipulated and propagated while covering Cho's campus gun crime.

To return to an analysis of my swing dance class, I construe that the female class members' impression of my body size and their homophobia definitely guided their actions. The women likely wanted to pair with "real" men because they take it for granted that in a couple's dance, a heterosexual pairing is natural and normal. They must have thought that two women dancing in a pair is unnatural and uncomfortable and

evokes lesbianism. Besides, as I am small and short, they might have assumed that I could not be a good leader; they failed to realize that body size does not matter to leading in swing dance. Good leading in dance stems from attentive caring and individual dance technique, not from maleness or big and tall male bodies. This personal anecdote pointedly demonstrates how gender is bound up in the interplay of race, body size, sexuality, and shifting cultural codes and political contexts.

As my anecdote suggests, it is presumed in popular thought that gender expresses sex, and that the gender binary is innate and necessary for normal (hetero) sexuality. Hegemonic models of gender presuppose that masculinity is the property of male bodies, and femaleness automatically produces femininity. Stemming from the essentialist equation of masculinity to maleness, female masculinity is conceived as a “pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment” (Halberstam 1998: 9). Male privilege functions as another factor that denigrates female masculinity because female masculinity threatens men’s social power, which is predicated on male masculinity, and disturbs the hierarchical gender norm.

My dissertation project explores how butch lesbians and female-born gender variants embody and represent their masculinities and multiple queer genders in performance art and drag king shows. A drag king refers to a woman or female-born person who performs their gender as fluid by playing diverse masculinities on stage, usually wearing masculine costumes and make-up.<sup>1</sup> I discuss how butch lesbians and female-born gender variants foreground the performative nature of masculinity,

---

<sup>1</sup> Some drag kings also perform feminine characters in feminine make-up and costume.

deconstruct heteronormative gender, and redefine established categories of gender and sexuality through performance. I especially focus on how race, ethnicity, and class are involved in constituting, embodying, and performing female masculinities, and how the intersections of other social markers yield myriad differences in terms of stakes, styles, and forms of masculinity. I describe and analyze in great depth Peggy Shaw's *Menopausal Gentleman* and *To My Chagrin*; kt shorb's [sic] *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* and D'Lo's *Ramble-Ations*; drag king performances in the International Drag KingCommunity [sic] Extravaganza (IDKE) showcases.<sup>2</sup> As Halberstam points out, since "different women express their masculinities in different ways and that variability may have everything to do with social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation" (Jagose), my study of female masculinities across different genres, venues, and geographic locations will demonstrate a spectrum of masculine gender practices and their diversity in relation to other social vectors.

Gender theorist Judith Halberstam's critical view on gender construction resonates with my project. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam asks:

If three decades of feminist theorizing about gender has thoroughly dislodged the notion that anatomy is destiny, that gender is natural, and that male and female are the only options, why do we still operate in a world that assumes that people who are not male are female, and people who are not female are male. [. . .] If gender has been thoroughly

---

<sup>2</sup> IDKE is a four-day collaborative, non-competitive event which features an academic conference, non-academic workshops, panel discussions, a visual art exhibition, film screenings, and a science fair, as well as a drag king showcase.

defamiliarized, in other words, why do we not have multiple gender options, multiple gender categories, and real life nonmale [sic] and nonfemale [sic] options for embodiment and identification? (1998: 20)

Despite feminists' theorization of gender as social construct, the bipolar two-gender system has still not been fundamentally questioned and reconstructed. Also, the indifference to and marginalization of female masculinity have been continued in dominant representations and in critical scholarship. In this introduction, I define key terms in my research, summarize the previous theorization of women's masculine genders, and describe my research questions. I conclude my introduction with chapter outlines which précis my various methodologies and case studies.

In the title of my project and throughout my dissertation, "female" specifically and precisely indicates "female-bodied" or "female-born" or "female-assigned at birth." Although I simply mention "female" in my project, in all my usage of it, "female" always denotes the three cases. The word "female" also includes female-identified lesbians and diverse gender variants including transgenders/transsexuals who do not identify as female. Some transgenders maintain female bodies, but do not identify as female. Some butch lesbians display masculine gender presentation, but embrace their femaleness without male-identification. Transsexuals transform and modify their female bodies to acquire maleness through sex reassignment surgery and hormone injections.<sup>3</sup> Although

---

<sup>3</sup> Commonly, the transsexual who undergoes sexual reassignment surgery or wants medical gender transition is distinguished from the transgender who intentionally inhabits gender ambiguity or hybridity without transition operation. However, this distinction is no longer clear. Some post-operation transsexuals call themselves "tranny" or "trans" or "transgender" without any sex markers such as FTM (female to male). Many transgenders have partial body modifications and take hormone treatments. The two terms overlap and are interchanged in some cases because each identity is differently understood, depending on an individual.

some intersexed or intergendered persons were assigned the female sex at birth and raised female, they might not identify as female. As such, diverse gender identifications exist through or against femaleness. The reason I include non-female identified gender variants under the label of “female” is not to reduce them to the female sex, but to mark their particular subjectivity distinct from genetic (bio) male masculinity. To borrow from Halberstam’s methodology, I use the term female masculinity “as a general rubric which [. . .] allows for the grouping together of a number of different gender affiliations and expressions trans historically” (Jagose). Accordingly, in my dissertation, the marker of “female” is not limited to female-identified or female-bodied persons.

Masculinity can be defined as “extroverted expressions of qualities that are ascribed to males” or traits and characteristics that are considered masculine within a given cultural context (Green 2005: 296). Masculinity is expressed and perceived through gestures/movements, postures, behaviors, voice and speech patterns, stride, clothing, hairstyles, body shape/size, physicality, and personality. Cultural symbols and signals of masculinity vary in society and shift over time. Female masculinity refers to female-born/bodied persons’ masculine gender embodiment, which is widely considered the province of male bodies. While masculinity is frequently reified and marked by visual display and physical features, some genderqueer theorists emphasize the non-visual characteristics of masculinity. Transgender theorist Jamison Green notes in “The Art and Nature of Gender”:

I came to understand that gender cues are not all visual, superficial, or visible on the body. They are not all determined by cultural presumptions or agreements about the variable characteristics that we take

on as roles or costumes. I had a growing sense that there is something about gender that is not expressed only in clothing, hairstyles, body shapes, voices, even the conscious awareness that a body has a designated sex. There is something else going on. (2001: 61)

Green understands masculinity as a kind of energy beyond appearance and behaviors. Many theoretical interests and inquiries into gender queerness have focused on visual exterior and manifestation. Consequently, psychology, dispositions, and feelings/emotions pertinent to female masculinity have not gained adequate attention and not been fully explored even within lesbian/queer studies. Both dominant discourses and queer communities have long held the notion that the masculine is antithetical to the emotional. Yet, explaining his gender transition experience in “Manliness,” transgender critic Patrick Califia redresses internal gendered traits: “Things like compassion, honesty, the ability to nurture, independence, self-care, vulnerability, friendship, desire, creativity, or industry are worthwhile qualities for both men and women” (436). In my project, to extend the discussion of female masculinity, I pay attention to how some gender-variant performers incorporate emotive sensitivity and feelings into their constitution of masculinity.

Sometimes, I use masculinity as a single noun to refer to a collective concept or a social construct, but in most cases, I prefer the plural noun. Female masculinities underscore the diversity and multiplicity of masculinity, considering “pluralistic gender histories” and “pluralistic challenges to the male/female, woman/man, lesbian, butch/femme constructions and identities” (Nestle 2002: 9). Although female masculinities are practiced by heterosexual women and teenage girls (or younger gender variants), I limit my research to adult lesbian and queer subjects in America. I do so because I

value the subversive potential to disrupt heteronormativity through gender transgression, and am drawn to stage performances by lesbian and queer performers that imagine new social arrangements of gender, race, and sexuality.

Instead of female-bodied/-born gender variants, I frequently use the term “genderqueers” (or what some call gender queers), which has been growing popular in queer communities since the late 1990s. A genderqueer is any gender-variant individual who destabilizes or problematizes the binary of gender, including gender-fluid and transgendered persons and transsexuals. Genderqueer is a term encompassing all non-conforming gender agents who reject the two-gender system and valorize gender fluidity and multiplicity. Some gender variants prefer “genderqueer” because it is an inclusive umbrella term that refuses the classification or fixation of gender.

In performing queer genders, some performers in my case studies employ a mode of genderfuck. “Genderfuck” (or gender-fuck) refers to a queer gender-act or signification of “emphasizing gender ambiguity and challenging traditional gender concepts” (Nataf 63). In the wake of queer politics, many genderqueers use this term to take gender bending (crossing the gender line or mixing genders) further in an in-your-face style. In “Genderfuck: the Law of the Dildo,” June L. Reich defines genderfuck as producing “meaning in a symbol-performance matrix that crosses through sex and gender and destabilizes the boundaries of our recognition of sex, gender, and sexual practice” (255). Another definition of genderfuck specifies that it is to deliberately send “mixed messages about one’s sex, usually through dress, [and is] associated with contempt for gender binary standards, exhibited by combining extremes from male and female gender

roles.”<sup>4</sup> There exist many modes of genderfucking by diverse genderqueers.

I also use the term “queer” both as an adjective and as a verb. Representatively, I define “queer genders” as multiple gender presentations and identities that deviate from the two-gender norm. Queer genders refer to all gender identifications that resist normative gender and transgress conventional gender rules: “neither a man nor a woman,” or “both a man and a woman,” or diverse in-between genders. As a verb, in a narrow sense, to “queer” connotes reclaiming, reappropriating, and reinterpreting something from a non-conforming sexual minority perspective or transforming something in the pursuit of abnormalized non-heterosexual desire and pleasure. Broadly, to queer is to disrupt heteronormativity, to challenge any kind of binarism and normal regimes, and to defamiliarize conventional understanding of gender and sexuality.

### **Theoretical Overview**

My project relies on Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity and Judith Halberstam’s theorization of female masculinity. Butler’s theory of performative gender as laid out in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) unraveled the essentialist link between maleness and masculinity and demonstrated that there exists no innate, appropriate gender. Butler articulates that gender is constituted through “a stylized repetition of acts” (1990: 272), and that “gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express” (1991:24). This means

---

<sup>4</sup> “Common Trans ‘Definitions’ and Terms,”  
<[http://www.oberlin.edu/mrc/Workshops.Trainings/trans\\_trainings/Trans%20Definitions.pdf](http://www.oberlin.edu/mrc/Workshops.Trainings/trans_trainings/Trans%20Definitions.pdf)>.

that a given stylization can be differently performed, revised, and subverted. Gender as imitation is inherently open for “a different sort of repeating” and alternative improvisations (1990: 271). In addition to Butler’s conceptualization of performative gender, lesbian scholars’ discussions of lesbian butchness have offered a foundation for the theorization of female masculinity.

Initially, Sue Ellen Case established the concept of the “butch-femme aesthetic.” She focused on the inter-dependent butch-femme relationship with a class-sensitive awareness, accounting for butchness as a sexual identity rather than a gender identity. Her primary concern was to criticize a “lesbian feminist movement that turned away from role-playing into privileging androgyny or non-gendered styles” (1998: 44). However, Sherrie Inness and Michele E. Lloyd suggest that the chief identifying trait of the butch is not sexual desire and choice of sexual object, but masculinity (27). I would add to this critique that the term role-playing fails to fully explicate embodied experiences of gender and sexuality in favor of an instant and artificial structure.

In “Of Catamites and Kings,” Gayle Rubin defines butches as lesbians who are “more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, and identities rather than feminine ones” (467). She finds a butch’s fundamental characteristic in the coexistence of masculine traits with a female anatomy. Rubin articulates, “Forms of masculinity are molded by the experiences and expectations of class, race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, age, subculture, and individual personality” (470). Although she stresses varieties of butch, a critical race analysis of constructing masculinity is totally left out of her argument.

Esther Newton’s article “My Butch Career: A Memoir” deals with class, race, and

ethnicity in constituting butchness. She names her own butch desire as finding an Alice (B. Toklas), identifying herself with Gertrude Stein (as her mannish ego ideal), and compares her gender to “a horse with stripes, a zebra” in contrast to a horse as an ordinary woman (92). In doing so, she illustrates how middle-class privilege facilitates social acceptance of her butch masculinity, and how Jewishness engages in her gender embodiment. Newton reports that “working–class butches paid the price of their visibility with unemployment, beatings, or having to pass as men” (91). Like Rubin, Newton also prizes the contradiction of femaleness with masculinity to disrupt notions of gender as biologically determined.

Clearly, Case, Rubin, and Newton have all productively contributed to theoretical formulations of lesbian masculinity. However, it is obvious that all of them focus on the butch and rigidly adhere to that category. They did not discuss drag kings and genderqueers (including transgenders), which marks their perspectives as belonging to an older generation.<sup>5</sup> As part of the next generation, Halberstam proposes that we need to explore butchness of color, queer masculinities in immigrant populations, the formulations of class and butch power, and the relations between butch and transgender masculinities (1998 “Between Butches”: 64). Whereas Butler focuses on female impersonation and drag queens and equates drag queen acts with butch-femme role-playing, Halberstam attempts to produce an independent theory of female masculinity based on lesbian history and to expand butchness through a diverse spectrum of multiple queer genders.

---

<sup>5</sup> Female to male transgenderism and genderqueerness started gaining academic attention in the late 1990s.

Halberstam coined the term “female masculinity” in order to rupture the naturalized link between maleness and masculinity and established a new theoretical framework to reconfigure female masculinity through her research on drag king shows in the late 1990s.<sup>6</sup> She maintains that female masculinity “refuses the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone” (2002: 345), and that it offers an alternative mode of masculinity that detaches privilege, legitimacy and social power from (male) masculinity. Dominant discourses presume that whereas masculinity is real, natural, and owned by males, femininity is artificial in nature and hence, it can be easily performed and imitated (Halberstam 1998: 234). Halberstam argues that female masculinity foregrounds the constructed nature of masculinity through the disjuncture between the female body and masculinity, and this deconstructs dominant notions that render (white) male masculinity as non-performative.

Although I draw inspiration for my project from Butler and Halberstam’s ideas, I hope to critically employ them and to extend their work with a further emphasis on class, race, and ethnicity. Butler asserts, “[g]ender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (1990 *Gender Trouble*: 3). Yet, ironically, her theory of performative gender does not tease out the intersections of social vectors. She does not elucidate how racial formations affect doing gender as a “stylized repetition of acts” (Yarbro-Berjarano 129). Sagri Dhairyam notes that by privileging the parodic

---

<sup>6</sup> In “F2M: Making Female Masculinity” (1994), Halberstam first used the term “female masculinity,” an idea which she developed further in *Female Masculinity* (1998).

aspects of gender and sexuality, Butler locates race and class identities in more foundationalist identity politics and glosses over how race and class identities are able to “mobilize subversive drag” (30). Furthermore, Butler’s performative theory points to the imitative nature of gender, but does not examine the context in which drag performance occurs: who performs what for which audience (Namaste 186).

Unlike Butler, Halberstam actively confronts how race operates in constructions and performances of female masculinity. Yet according to Jana Evans Braziel, “Halberstam indirectly reinforces the idea that while masculinity is performed and performative, race is a resilient or impermeable given” (168). Moreover, since Halberstam’s theorization of female masculinity privileged white and black female masculinity, non-black masculinities of color are almost elided from her discussion. I am critically aware of the invisibility of queers of color in queer cultures and communities in general, and I am particularly concerned with the dearth of scholarship on Asian female masculinity in queer gender studies and in queer performance studies. In response to this void, I devote considerable energy and effort to making queer Asian female masculinities visible. Throughout this dissertation, I dedicate much space to addressing how female-bodied Asian genderqueers use stage performance to negotiate and reckon with racial stereotypes of Asians, including the emasculation of Asian masculinity.

Many critical race theorists have attempted to deconstruct the essentialist understanding of race and to draw attention to its performative nature. Michael Omi and Howard Winant contend that “racial categories themselves are formed, transformed, destroyed, and reformed” through the negotiations of social, economic, and political

forces (qtd. in Dhairyam 31). This implies that race is also a social construction like gender, and racial meanings are constantly reshaped. Yvonne Yarbro-Berjarano also says, “No one becomes who he or she is in relation to only one social category, and no representation of sexuality is free of racialization” (130). Female masculinity does not only represent one’s gender but also exhibits a complicated confluence of conflicting subject positions in the interplay among class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality.

For example, Cherríe L. Moraga’s musing on her Mexican butchness testifies to how gender coalesces with cultural and ethnic identities. Moraga figures her butch identity from a Mexican myth of *la Chingada* and *Chingar*. The term “chingar” means “doing violence to another,” and the *chingón* refers to the macho male who rips open the *chingada* (109). She proclaims that she became the fucker (*chingón*) not to feel fucked (*la chingada*, as an ethnic betrayer) (115). Her butch desire and identity are based on her pursuit of control and independence in relation to a Mexican history of racism and colonization. Besides, her racial hybridity corresponds to her hermaphrodite fantasy of breasts and a bleeding cock.<sup>7</sup> Moraga’s attention to cultural specificity compels me to probe into differences of diverse sexual cultures and gender configuration.

Dorothy Allison and Joan Nestle remind us that our understanding of gender and sexuality can be imbued with a classist mindset. Allison writes that lesbophobia she experienced was sometimes directed at her behavior and sexual practices that originate from her working-class background (23). Allison’s point shows that class is closely

---

<sup>7</sup> In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga describes a dream that she had when she was about twelve years old: “I am in a hospital bed. [. . .] The breasts are large and ample. [. . .] I see my cock, wildly shooting menstrual blood totally out of control” (110).

linked to definition of sexual norms and morals. In *A Restricted Country*, Joan Nestle queries the contradictory approach to upper-class butch-femme couples and working class butch-femme role-playing and reveals the classist motivation inherent in the charge of butch-femme role-playing. She writes, “They make me wonder why there is such a consuming interest in the butch-femme lives of upper-class women, usually the more removed literary figures, while real-life, working butch and femme women are seen as imitative and culturally backward” (1987: 107). The repulsion of excessive butchness and denigration of female masculinity arise not only from antipathy of differently gendered people, but also from classism.

In *Heroic Desire*, Sally R. Munt uncovers the double layers of classism that associate butchness with working-classness. Commenting on the classed image of butch-femme and stylization of clothing, Munt writes:

There appears to be a class distinction operating here, one which is underpinned by the pervading class dualism of working-class/butch, middle-class/femme [...]. Ironically, the prevalently middle-class movement of lesbian feminism designated a uniform of working-class butch ‘day wear’ for the duration of the 1970s: denim, checked shirts, work boots, donkey jackets [. . .]. Although adopting ‘male-identified’ behavior was anathema to these lesbians, eroticizing cross-class, cross-gender style was not. (71)

While middle-class lesbian-feminists appropriated working-class clothing as an androgynous lesbian “style,” they accused real working-class butches of over-the-top butchness and (female) hyper-masculinity as a sign of anti-feminist male-identification.

Munt's critical observation exemplifies how class-consciousness (or deep-seated classism) permeates and penetrates our perceptions of masculinity. Likewise, class background and identity influence the formulation of female masculinity and generate different degrees and styles of masculinity. Moraga's, Allison's, Nestle's, and Munt's discussions of race/ethnicity and class, all of which inform and intertwine with gender, shed light on the intersectionality of gender and other social markers and provide critical insights to my investigation of female masculinities.

### **Research Questions**

My project asks how butch lesbian and genderqueer performers negotiate and configure the relations of the female body and masculinity. Rubin conceptualizes the contradiction between the female body and masculinity as gender dysphoria: "*Gender dysphoria* is a technical term for individuals who are dissatisfied with the gender to which they were assigned on the basis of their anatomical sex" (467). Halberstam suggests that gender dysphoria leads individuals to actively produce alternative masculinities in the disjuncture between femaleness and masculinity (1998: 119). She reappropriates the gender dysphoria inherent in female masculinity as a fruitful site at which to proliferate the mutability, multiplicity, ambiguity, and indeterminacy of gender. I discuss how the very conceptions of femaleness and masculinity are contested and integrated in staging female masculinities.

I am particularly invested in how theatre can function as a vehicle to unmask the assumed realness (non-performativity) of dominant masculinity, and in how the incongruity of femaleness and masculinity serves to expose the performative nature of

gender. How do performers illustrate that gender is “appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done”? (Butler 1991: 21) How do gestures/movements, music, props, lighting, sets, and costumes highlight constructed masculinity? Jill Dolan suggests that the stage can be used as a laboratory to “explore gender ambiguity and to play with, confound, and deconstruct gender categories” (1992: 8). The analogy between theatricality and the artificiality of gender makes performance a useful venue at which to denaturalize gender and to rehearse and imagine multiple genders outside of the socially enforced gender paradigms.

Furthermore, I delve into how class, race, and ethnicity are marked in performing female masculinities. This question calls for the examination of social conditions and limitations of gender subversion. Butler emphasizes that gender performativity should not be equated with a free will in everyday life performance: “The body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. [. . .] As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice” (1990: 272, 277). I draw on her point that even transgressive gender practices are restricted by other social factors. I am not denying the progressive potential of female masculinity, but instead suggest that it is necessary to explore these historical conditions that collide with gender in performance. Kath Weston articulates that bodies “are inscribed by people who select items of material culture from a restricted range of options and arrange them according to imaginations that are shaped by historical developments” (14). That is, butches and genderqueers employ different masculinities predicated on their multiple identities that different social positions necessitate. How does “doing race” multiply the alienation effect of gender

and illuminate performative gender? How and why do genderqueers of color perform racial excess and stereotypes? How is “whiteness” marked in the performance of white masculinity? What are the different stakes in white masculinities and masculinities of color? These questions will illustrate how intersections of diverse social markers facilitate the exposure of performative masculinity and demonstrate how performing female masculinities always draws attention to class, race, and ethnicity.

In analyzing performances by butches and genderqueers, I am intrigued by the varying relations between performed masculinity (character) and gender identity off stage. How does an on stage persona infiltrate off stage gender identity? How is daily gender identity/practice reflected in characters on stage? How does theatrical performance of masculinity on stage influence the (re)constitution of gender identity in everyday life? How do lesbians and genderqueers draw or even blur the line between “theatre” and “reality”? I examine how performers play with the (dis)continuity between masculine personas on stage and their own masculinities, and how the gap or continuum between the character and performer complicates the implications of performance texts.

Another of my research questions involves redefining lesbian butchness and expanding masculine genders of female-born persons. I ask how performed female masculinities on stage challenge the established myths or stereotypes of the butch, such as the myths that butches always desire femmes, never dance, and refuse to be penetrated sexually. Is being a butch necessarily about being a sexual initiator or a top? How do butch and genderqueer performers juxtapose gay male sexuality with butch-to-butch eroticism on stage? How do some butch performers represent their emotional

vulnerability? How do they portray and come to terms with butch feelings in conjunction with masculinity? How does butch emotion contest the dichotomy of femininity/masculinity? I look at how the reconfiguration of butchness is reflected in theatrical performance, and conversely, how butch performers generate new images of butchness through performance. Furthermore, I explore how genderqueers broaden a range of queer masculinity beyond butchness. I demonstrate how they revise the feminist critique of masculinity/male-identification as misogyny by forging and performing feminist masculinities. I will prove that “masculinity by itself is not the problem for feminism,” and the problem is the paradigm of the bipolar two genders (Green 2005: 298).

Through my dissertation, focusing on performances by queers of color and various genderqueers, I contend that numerous masculinities under diverse gender identifications are embodied and performed by butches and genderqueers without innate maleness. I argue that butches’ and genderqueers’ performances of alternative masculinities at the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality create a radical social criticism of a racist, heteronormative world. Following Dolan’s “utopian performative,” I hope to delineate how performances by genderqueers provide us with “consistent glimpses of utopia” (2001:456). In addition, I suggest that genderqueerness is compatible and productive for feminism, and that genderqueers develop and elaborate theories of gender construction/performativity through performance.

## **Methodology**

I employ textual analysis and performance analysis for my case studies. In my

dissertation, I deal with only American performers and discuss American lesbian/queer/drag king cultures. I closely read play and performance texts of solo performance artists, focusing on issues surrounding female masculinity. I thickly describe their work, scrutinizing how gestures/movements, music, props, lighting, sets, and costumes signify. I have seen live performance by most of the artists in my case studies, but since I did not see Peggy Shaw's performances, instead, I analyze performance videos of her *Menopausal Gentleman* and *To My Chagrin*. My primary concerns lie in performers and stage performances; although I discuss audience reception of performing masculinities in some cases, I do not center on spectatorship in my project. Rather, I concentrate my efforts on carrying out a thick description of each performance and invest more time and space to contextualizing performers' intentions and working processes. I explore how they explain their own gender identity as well as their ideas of masculinity and queer genders. I engage with critical discourses on female masculinity, class, race, sexuality, and cultural identity.

Although I focus on the theatrical representation of female masculinity, in addition to theoretical work, I also refer to poetry, spoken word, personal stories, published interviews, anthologies, web resources, and documentaries relevant to female-born genderqueers and butches to nuance my case studies. I use web resources to refer to interviews with queer performers, reviews of queer performances, and drag king troupes and cultures. Additionally, I interviewed performers about their working process to comprehend the subtexts of their performances and scripts. For my drag king case studies, I conducted e-mail interviews with select drag kings about the context and intention behind their performances, as well as their own beliefs about gender identity.

Since there is no script and speech on stage in drag king performance, drag kings' comments and statements in my e-mail interviews become vital references and resources for analyzing their performances.

### **Chapter Outlines**

In my first chapter, "Performing Aging White Butchness," I closely read the play texts and performance videos of Peggy Shaw's *Menopausal Gentleman* (1997) and *To My Chagrin* (2003). I examine how her gender-bending performance, which capitalizes on the contradictions between her aging female body and masculine gender display, portrays butch masculinity, sexuality, and emotion. I pay particular attention to how butchness shapes her musing on her aging, and how aging enables her to disclose emotional vulnerability and to revisit masculinity. In my analysis of *Menopausal Gentleman*, I address how Shaw represents the conflicts between her erratic menopausal body and masculinity through her queer reinterpretation of menopause. I show how she foregrounds "doing gender" by repeating certain gestures, such as fixing her necktie and adjusting her jacket, and by quoting diverse masculine styles from male actors and musicians in pop culture. In *To My Chagrin*, I discuss how she makes her whiteness visible, and how she reflects on her whiteness and internalized racism through her butch grandmotherhood. In passing on masculinity to her black mixed-race grandson, Shaw's passion for cars is a medium to explore her masculine lineage and to drive her butch desire. I delineate the ways in which she connects old cars to aging butchness and enacts manly imagery to understand her aging and to rejuvenate her aging female body. For my critical and theoretical conversations, I rely on Butler, Case, Dolan, Alisa

Solomon, S. Bear Bergman, Ann Cvetkovich, Kate Davy, and Marilyn Frye. In this chapter, I argue that Shaw's working-class identity is intimately tied to her formulation and performance of butch masculinity, and that she redefines butch/femme and femininity/masculinity through her menopausal butch body, emotionality, and her queer grandmotherhood.

In my second chapter, "Queering Asian Female Masculinities," I provide a critical reading of Japanese-white mixed transgender kt shorb's *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* (2005) and Tamil Sri-Lankan gay woman D'Lo's *Ramble-Ations* (2006). This case study was prompted by my concerns about emasculated Asian masculinity and interests in the internal differences within Asianness. shorb and D'Lo demonstrate different stakes of emasculation of Asian masculinity and negotiate it differently, based on their ethnic and gender differences and their varied cultural identities.<sup>8</sup> shorb counters the effeminization of Asian masculinity by presenting assertive and aggressive Asian male characters; D'Lo blends racial ambiguity or "passing" with comedy, embodying a hip-hop aesthetic and the trappings of blackness. Through my performance analysis of *of chicks, dicks, and chinks*, I discuss how shorb criticizes racism against Asians and wrestles with stereotypes related to the racial castration of Asian men through hir [sic] male impersonation.<sup>9</sup> I also examine how shorb represents the interconnectedness of racism, gender policing, and lesbophobia in hir autobiographical character.

In the second half of the chapter, I contextualize D'Lo's multiple identities and

---

<sup>8</sup> "Gender differences" indicates that shorb is transgender, but D'Lo identifies as a gay woman.

<sup>9</sup> Transgender activist/writer Leslie Feinberg introduces that some genderqueers use the possessive gender-neutral pronoun, "hir" (71). To mark shorb's trans identity, I use the word of "hir."

the politics that ground her artwork. Then, I investigate how she integrates gay/hip-hop/Hindu spirituality and crosses many borders within race and gender by enacting hip-hop masculinity in her spoken word pieces and in the monologues of her feminist male characters. In this chapter, I hope to de-center “Asianness” as a homogenous category and to underline, in the words of Lisa Lowe, the “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” of Asian-Americanness. Drawing on David L. Eng, Thomas K. Nakayama, Richard Fung, Gayatri Gopinath, E. Patrick Johnson, and Stuart Hall, I illuminate how Asian-American female masculinity is constituted in the interlocking of class, ethnicity, diasporas, gender dysphoria, and cultural identities.

In my third chapter, “Performing Queer Genders in Drag King Shows,” I offer an overview of drag king culture and analyze select performances from the 6<sup>th</sup> (Chicago, 2004) and 8<sup>th</sup> (Austin, 2006) International Drag King Community Extravaganza showcases. With an emphasis on drag kings of color and genderqueer drag kings, I describe and discuss how they highlight the performative nature of masculinity through costumes, make-up, props, and men’s music, and how they wear race, class, and ethnicity in performing their queer masculinities. Critically engaging with Halberstam’s arguments and the ideas of the authors of the book *The Drag King Anthology*, I focus on how drag kings disrupt the normative gender binary and celebrate gender ambiguity and fluidity. Furthermore, I depict how drag kings stage “gender dysphoria” as euphoria for queer desire and pleasure in a “utopian vision of radically different bodies and sexualities” (Halberstam 1998: 41). I explore ways in which they suggest and embody alternative configurations of sex/gender/sexuality through their performance of queer masculinities. I argue that drag kings combine queer subcultural entertainment and

political activism and productively synthesize feminism and queer gender politics. And yet, importantly, I am compelled to excavate the contradictions and limitations within the drag king community and culture through their performance and audiences' reception. Although I showcase diverse queer genders in this case study, the various styles and forms of masculinity also attest to social contradictions that differentiate queer bodies on stage. Therefore, comparing different stakes and dilemmas of performing masculinities, I interrogate how drag kings of color manage racial stereotypes and legibility in their representation of masculinities of color. Lastly, I point out the limitations of the drag king performance form and emphasize the importance of audiences' cultural competency.

In my conclusion, "Toward the Critical Artfulness of Gender," to rehearse significant meanings of female masculinities, I highlight existing gender differences among women and female-born genderqueers and remind readers of the intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I underscore how the artificiality of theatre and performative gender interlock in staged queer masculinities. Then, I summarize my case studies by mapping out diverse genderqueer performances and various masculine identifications and by comparing them in terms of age, gender, racial, ethnic, strategic, and genre/venue differences. In addition, based on my own research process and achievements, I meditate on my learning and suggest a prospective research project regarding transgender masculinities. I conclude that performing female masculinities can foster the critical artfulness of gender by engaging in social criticism of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

## Chapter 2: Performing Aging White Butchness

Peggy's supremely transgressive art explodes every box which might be used in some vain attempt to contain her: language, societal norms, sex, fashion, romance, art—she breathes life into all of them and there is nothing but surprise and pleasure in store for anyone encountering her.  
— Craig Lucas

Butch anthropologist Esther Newton writes that butches have “the power of artists to make new forms of our cultural clay, the impact of the intended word and fabulous gesture” in the heteronormative world (92). Butchness has been regarded as a traditional and representative rendition of female masculinity. Unlike female to male transsexuals or transgenders, although many butches experience a feeling of being in the “wrong” body or dissatisfaction with their female bodies, they do not identify as male and do not want to make the female-to-male transition.<sup>10</sup> Rather, butches create their gender art in the disjuncture between femaleness and masculinity.

However, after the influences of queer politics and the emergence of transgenderism in the 1990s, some lesbians and assigned-female genderqueers do not want to identify as butch<sup>11</sup> or they prefer the category “transgender” with more active male-identification and body transformation or hormone injections. Considering the increasing number of transgenders and the current preference in queer academia and lesbian/queer communities writ large for the word “queer” over “butch,” Peggy Shaw's performance occupies a significant position in that she continues to explore butch

---

<sup>10</sup> Responding to the question, “What's your most vivid memory from childhood?” Shaw answers, “Thinking I was born in the wrong body.”

<[http://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/grant\\_receipients/peggyshaw.html](http://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/grant_receipients/peggyshaw.html) >.

<sup>11</sup> Some people think that the category “butch” is old-fashioned as a generation-specific marker. Other genderqueer lesbians regard the butch label as confining, and not inclusive enough to allow for gender fluidity.

representation through lesbian/feminist theatre.

Peggy Shaw is a renowned butch performance artist who has worked over three decades in lesbian/queer/feminist theatre since the 1970s. She is an Irish working-class actor/playwright/teacher, and a butch grandmother who is now in her 60s. Her gender-bending performance, acting out butchness, queer twists of popular culture, and her enactment of popular music by men have been the signatures of her theatre work. Shaw was a painter, printmaker, and a social worker before she started her theatre career. In 1972, she ran into a black drag queen in the street in New York and got a show flyer from him. Then, from curiosity, she followed him and joined Hot Peaches, a drag queen troupe (Shaw 2006: 25). During Hot Peaches' European tours in the 1970s, she met Lois Weaver from Spiderwoman (a feminist theatre group) and joined Spiderwoman. Shaw recollects in "How I Learned Theatre":

It was the seventies, right? Everyone was talking about being "separate from the men." [. . .] "In order to grow—you have a flower in a pot and if you have one flower that's bigger than the other, it blocks the sun." So in order for me to grow, I had to get away from the boys and get in my own little pot. (2006: 26)

Although she mentions separatist feminism of the 1970s, it is worth noting that her theatrical home was a queer (drag queen) theatre, not a feminist or lesbian theatre. She is now acknowledged as a pioneer in lesbian and feminist theatre, but she was not a typical lesbian-feminist of the 1970's. Rather, drag practice was more natural to

her in that she performs masculinity and does female drag.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, she had a closer affinity with working classed butch-femme lesbian bar culture rather than with educated radical feminist circles.<sup>13</sup>

Describing butchness in the 1970s, Sue-Ellen Case makes a distinction between “classical butch” (working-class bar butch) and “hippie neo-butch” (influenced by lesbian-feminism) (1998: 42). The anti-male identification of radical feminism was reflected in the androgynous style of the neo-butch. The classical butch and hippie neo-butch had different butch conventions such as a clothing style, movements, gestures, and postures.<sup>14</sup> Newton also documents that masculinity of working-class butches tended to be taken for more granted, and working-class lesbians were resistant to lesbian-feminist criticism of butch/fem role-playing in the 1970s and 1980s (90). According to Case’s classification and Newton’s memoir, Shaw was a classical butch. However, interestingly enough, Shaw’s über-butchness contrasts with the fact that she gave birth to her own child. She does not identify as male or transgender, but her relationships to femaleness have been complicated and contradictory, alternating between her rejection and acceptance of it, which leads to complex layers of gender performance onstage.

After Shaw left Spiderwoman due to inside conflicts in 1981, she formed Split Britches Theater Company with Lois Weaver and Deb Margolin. With Weaver, she held Women’s One World (WOW) lesbian theater festivals, and founded the WOW Café,

---

<sup>12</sup> She says that she learned from the boys in Hot Peaches “how to be a girl” because she had never really been a girl before (Shaw 2006: 26).

<sup>13</sup> Yet in Split Britches (lesbian/feminist theatre group) and at the WOW Café (lesbian/feminist theatre space), Shaw has combined the butch-femme aesthetics with feminism through her performance.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, holding a cigarette between thumb and first finger was marked as working-class (Case 1998: 41).

an alternative performance space for women in New York. Beginning in the mid-1990s with *You're Just Like My Father*, Shaw started working on her own solo shows as well as her collaborations with Split Britches. *Menopausal Gentleman (MG, 1997)* and *To My Chagrin (TMC, 2001)* completed her solo butch trilogy, which focuses on her aging butchness through menopause and grand(butch)motherhood.

Even the lesbian community, reflecting the prevalent ageism in the larger society, centers on lesbian youth culture. Hence, aging and older lesbians are underrepresented and remain invisible. Discussing ageism in the lesbian community, Baba Copper writes that the phrase “over the hill,” which describes old people, implies metaphorically “out of sight” (Copper 1). Although Shaw does not directly bring up and focus on ageism in her performance, Shaw’s vigorous efforts for representation of aging butchness contribute to “re/membering old lesbians as sexual, attractive, useful, integral parts” of the lesbian world (Copper 4). Women’s aging or menopause has rarely been explored in lesbian/feminist theatre, and even within gay and lesbian studies of aging, most research and writing focus on older male gays’ lives. Therefore, Shaw’s performance serves to enhance the visibility of the aging butch.

In this chapter, as I focus on representation of aging butchness and butch feelings, I choose to discuss only *MG* and *TMC*. Whereas *You're Just Like My Father* deals with her childhood in Belmont, Massachusetts and queers her relationships with her parents, *MG* more explicitly addresses aging butchness, and *TMC* foregrounds the intersections of race, class, age, gender, and sexuality. *MG* and *TMC* actively reveal butch emotions through aging in redefining butch/fem and masculinity/femininity. As lesbian writer Sandy Boucher indicates in “Half of a Map,” through aging experiences, older lesbians

tend to recognize their vulnerability (169). Certainly, more tolerance of vulnerability allows for the opening of clenched butch emotions. Aging gives people a clear sense of their mortality and a “chance to reflect on their life” (O’Sullivan 63). In this chapter, I closely read the *MG* and *TMC* scripts and performance videos in order to examine how Shaw plays with the contradiction of femaleness with masculinity and to delve into how she represents an aging white working-class butchness. Moreover, I explore how she demonstrates the possibility of coming out of an emotional butch closet and expanding concepts of the feminine and the masculine.

### **Menopausal Gentleman: A Butch Blues for Masculinity in Menopause**

In *MG*, Shaw reflects on her own experiences of menopause and aging, including painful physical symptoms and feelings of loss.<sup>15</sup> Shaw carves out a representational space for the aging butch and takes further steps toward queer gender performativity by juxtaposing “menopause” with “practicing masculine gender” in an extreme opposition. Since her menopausal experience is different from straight women’s, she brings to the stage a new story of women’s aging and menopause. Unlike most straight women, Shaw is not concerned about the loss of womanhood or feminine attraction. Thus, *MG* suggests that women’s menopausal experiences are constituted differently by various identity positions and practices.

In this section, I will look at how Shaw negotiates the disjuncture between female biological permutations and her own embodied masculinity, and how she performs aging

---

<sup>15</sup> I am very grateful to my dissertation advisor Jill Dolan for sharing a copy of the unpublished script and a videotape of the performance with me.

butchness. I will explore the ways in which her butchness affects her perceptions of aging and menopause, and the ways in which her menopausal experience generates different (re)configurations of her masculinity, sexuality, and desire. First, I will discuss how she queerly reinterprets menopause and produces gender-bending meanings using the tiger metaphor. Second, I will analyze how she configures conflicts between inside changes (menopausal body) and outside masculinity (gentleman). In addition, I will address how Shaw highlights the constructedness of masculinity through her constant work of manufacturing masculinity on her menopausal body. Lastly, I will examine how butch menopause arouses and is connected to butch emotion. Considering Shaw's butch vulnerability/melancholy in contrast with her outward toughness, I will probe into how her butch emotion destabilizes the binary between "the feminine" and "the masculine" in general and between "the active" and "the passive" or giving and taking in the butch-femme dyad in particular.

Shaw compares her volatile menopausal body to the beast – a tiger – inside her. She names 4:00 a.m., the hour of the wolf, as "Tiger Time." This liminal time (neither night nor morning) is the border between a gentleman outside (in the daylight) and a beast inside (in the dark). Shaw claims that she is a "fairy tale tiger passing as a gentleman." Throughout the performance, she repeats, "DON'T PANIC, Grrr," sticks out her tongue, makes growling hand gestures like paws, roars like a tiger, and even crawls on stage. Furthermore, by saying that "I console myself by licking my hands, my paws, my menopause," she puns with the words, "paws" and "pause." She makes an analogy between the erratic change or uncontrollable state in her body and wild animality. The animality of menopause is situated in contrast to her gentlemanliness,

and “the wild” (femaleness) contradicts with “the cultural” (refined masculinity).

However, the boundary between the wild and the cultural blurs immediately in her lip-sync to “I’M A MAN.” Shaw wears a gray double-breasted, pin-striped suit with a white handkerchief folded in a chest pocket, a white dress shirt, a red necktie with white patterns, and red suspenders.<sup>16</sup> There is nothing on stage but a low wood bench on the center. While Shaw, wearing a man’s suit, revels in her own masculinity during her lip-sync, diverse natural sounds including tiger sound effects overlap with the melody and her words, as if she is a gentleman in the middle of a jungle. The tiger sound effects last until her lip-sync ends. Shaw faces the audience in front of the bench, keeping her chin up and frowning and says elatedly, “I’M A M.A.N. Aged like wine.” She replaces a negative image of old women with glorification of aging manliness. Pointing the audience, she boasts, “I could make love to you baby in an hour’s time.” Shaw emphasizes the word “M\*A\*N” [sic] by punctuating each one of the letters with arm gestures in the shape of letters, saying “Spelled M\*A\*N MAN.” When she fiercely plays air-guitar like a macho rock star, Shaw parallels a tiger’s wildness with butch toughness or hyper masculinity by alternately acting as a tough guy and a roaring tiger. She roars, licking her hands and sticks out her tongue, snarls, raises her arms over her head, and repeatedly adjusts her necktie and mops her forehead with her handkerchief. As a loud tiger-growling sound plays, she puts her hands on her necktie in a frozen pose, and then the music stops. Finally, in the words of Shaw, growling like a tiger resonates with “keeping her voice low” to match her suit in her mind. That is, queerly enough, the

---

<sup>16</sup> The script indicates that her breasts are “strapped down for full passing effect.”

tiger originated from menopause is emblematic of her masculinity.

Furthermore, the tiger signifies wild sexual desire in addition to the erratic menopausal body and tough masculinity. Shaw says, “Like Tina Turner, I’m gonna start real slow and then I’m gonna get rough. [. . .] Rip off your pants with my teeth. GRRRRRRRR. That’s the Tiger [sic] part!!” mocking a roaring tiger. The tiger extends to the sexual aggressiveness and tireless sexual energy of the butch, beyond just her masculine gender display. After she depicts in detail her tough lead in sex with a femme and sticks out her tongue like a tiger, she recites the lyrics of Nina Simone’s “In the Dark.”

Now in the dark in the dark  
I get such a thrill  
When she presses her fingertipsss upon my lipsssssss  
And she begs me to please keep still<sup>17</sup>

Here, Shaw makes Simone’s heterosexual love blues a lesbian song by changing the gender of the original lyrics, from “he” to “she.” Her painful and fearful night (darkness) in menopause is magically transformed into an erotic setting of the butch-femme in her fantasy.

After her lip-sync, Shaw draws attention to her isolated body in menopause through her mini flashlight-dance. As Simone’s song continues, Shaw moves her body as if she is sexually aroused, and starts dancing in the dark with mini flashlights tied to her wrists and ankles. In doing so, only her glowing limbs with transparent skin and

---

<sup>17</sup> I follow the punctuation in the unpublished, unpaginated script as it is. Shaw does not keep her punctuation consistent.

veins are seen. Making her skin almost transparent functions as a “special effect” to highlight her volatile inside (menopause) in opposition to the outside masculinity (Dolan).<sup>18</sup> Shaw showcases her hands by stretching her fingers and waving her hands. As she leans her arms on the wall, shadows of her hands loom. In her review of *MG*, Marcia L. Ferguson argues, “Shaw’s hands distill the essence of the performance: they stroke her masculine persona into place (knotting the tie, brushing the lapels, hoisting the crotch) and physically describe the arc of female menopausal/animal desire” (375).<sup>19</sup> Her hands are a tool for masculine adjustment as well as tiger paws, a metonym of her menopausal body. This flashlight dance, “like an apparition with no body,” focuses the audience’s attention on her isolated body parts and “evokes the absence of the whole” (Dolan 2001: 470). Ironically, this compelling body-less image in the dark contravenes Simone’s romantic song and Shaw’s sexual wildness.

Prompted by her own gender/sexual identity, Shaw reconfigures menopause by forging a gender-bending linkage, the tiger. When she says, “I have a tiger in my tank. I can’t keep my paws off you,” the tiger fuels her life energy and sexual desire. As her “companions [sic] of forty years [menstruation] have left” her, she discovers a tiger in her tank. Shaw’s tiger metaphor of menopause in association with her butch identity subverts the cultural imagery of the menopausal woman as “lacking” or the loss of sexual desire. As Paul A. Komesaroff, Philipa Rothfield, and Jeanne Daly indicate pointedly, “There is no such thing as *the* menopause. [. . .] The various components do not fit

---

<sup>18</sup> Dolan’s e-mail to me on Aug 29, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Shaw frequently emphasizes her hands in her performance. I will discuss the implications of her hands in relation to working-class butch sexuality more in detail in my analysis of *To My Chagrin*.

together in a single, well definable whole, nor should they” (13). It is often assumed that women in menopause are frustrated by the loss of fertility, which many consider to signal the end of womanhood. On the contrary, Shaw develops other manifestations of menopause and generates new meanings from her own menopausal experiences. She proves that menopausal experience cannot be universalized across individual differences, and she disrupts the prevalent, unified assumptions about menopause.

Since lesbian experiences of menopause vary widely in individuals, it is hard to encompass diverse experiences among lesbians. Lesbian writer Sue O’Sullivan writes in “Menopause Waltz” that she was delighted with the cessation of bleeding but worried about “getting a dried-up cunt” (60). Discussing lesbian menopause, Marg Yeo recognizes positive sides of menopause in that she feels she’s “finally grown up” and has become wiser about “what’s important and what isn’t” in her life (36). As such, the meanings and concerns regarding menopause are differently constructed by individual lesbian subjects.

However, the diversity and heterogeneity of menopausal experiences do not imply that “women do not experience discomfort, perplexity, turmoil, or pain” (Komesaroff et al 13). Surely, Shaw is not exempt from physical effects and mood swings due to hormonal change. As Joan Chrisler and Laurie Ghiz assert, “Regardless of whether menopause is viewed as a positive or negative occurrence, it certainly changes how women perceive their bodies” (qtd. in Kelly 31). Shaw suffers from sweat, hot flashes, insomnia, and nervousness, and she is worried about her brittle bones. Nevertheless, what is interesting is that she is not anxious about defeminization or changes of physical

appearance through aging and menopause like most feminine women are.<sup>20</sup> Rather, she proclaims that she is a “woman passing as a man [sic] looks like a younger man, a man passing as a woman [sic] looks like an older woman.” She faces the audience and adds, “I keep young by passing. I sacrifice being a woman for youth. It’s a trade off.” Whereas most feminine women equate youth with femininity, Shaw testifies to maintaining her youth more effectively by forsaking womanhood. Moreover, with this conception, she sets forth a peculiar definition of women and men. Fixing the knot of her tie and the collar of her jacket with her hands, she says, “They say a lot of women get like men in menopause cause [sic] they grow a beard and get dried out. I guess that’s their definition of man. A hairy, dried up woman.” Shaw implies that though most women are afraid of becoming hairy and dried up, she is free from the traps of feminine youth and beauty by performing masculinity, and instead, she is concerned that her masculinity is hindered by her femaleness.

Some lesbian writers insist that lesbian women are more capable of developing useful and flexible strategies to deal with their aging (Cowan et al 62). It can be argued that Shaw’s queer adaptation of aging derives from her (working-class) butch identity. She has come to terms not only with her sexual identity (lesbian) but also with her deviant gender identity as a masculine woman. There is no question that her existence and experience as a butch lesbian is conducive to grappling with aging and menopause.

However, Dolan suggests that Shaw’s queer interpretation of menopause is not so

---

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Shaw’s appearance anxiety concerns her masculine side. She says, “I’m afraid I look like a middle aged guy who wears his pants too tight and his shirt is too loud and who’s like an anachronism. Also the kinda guy who has to have his belly sticking out over his belt” (*MG*).

much merely adaptive as transgressive, relying on Elizabeth Grosz's notion of "the leaky female body/fluids."<sup>21</sup> Grosz's analysis of the leaky female body offers a critical reference to understand Shaw's manly sweat. Grosz explains how the female body is "sexed" as dangerous fluids:

[T]hey [women] are represented and live themselves as seepage, liquidity. The metaphors of uncontrollability, the ambivalence between desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep-seated fear of absorption, the association of femininity with contagion and disorder, the undecidability of the limits of the female body [. . .] are all common themes in literary and cultural representations of women. [. . .] [t]here remains a broadly common coding of the female body as a body which leaks, which bleeds, which is at the mercy of hormonal and reproductive functions. (203-204)

In male-dominant imagery, the leaking female body connotes "defilement" or "horror" to disturb a solid, clean, and proper order. Menstruation is the most disgusting and dirty fluid in that it is viscous blood, which evokes a fear of contamination, and that it is subject to reproduction (female corporeality). In *MG*, Shaw presents herself as a currently menopausal (no bleeding) "gentleman" and does not speak of her menstrual past. Dolan points out that Shaw "only leaks when she sweats" and does not mention any other female leakage except for sweat, "which is very manly."<sup>22</sup> And yet, it must not be obscured that ironically, her "manly" sweat consists of fluids that her (female) menopausal body secretes. Although she talks about her menopausal experiences on

---

<sup>21</sup> Her e-mail correspondence with me on Aug 29, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Her e-mail correspondence with me on Aug 29, 2007.

stage, her visual butch masculinity in a man's suit constantly contradicts the fact that she has a female body. While she talks about hot flashes and night sweats, what the audience sees is manly sweat due to physical exertion of the butch body. Through the queer signification of female leakage (sweat), Shaw disrupts hegemonic cultural representations of women that reduce the female body to femininity, and furthermore, she undermines the dichotomy of men/mind/solid and women/body/leaky.

By engaging with the tension between susceptible femaleness (inside the menopausal body) and masculine gender display (outside gentlemanliness), Shaw exposes the constructed nature of masculinity and spotlights her labor of doing gender. Throughout the performance, Shaw keeps wiping sweat off her face with her handkerchief. When she says in the middle of the performance, "It's hot in here, isn't it?" she refers not only to the exhaustion of exerting her physicality but also to "her private summer (hot flashes)." Her repetitive gestures to mop her sweat poignantly foreground the contradiction between the inner female body and outer masculinity. The sweat makes her do "the hard work of being a gentleman in menopause" and perform "the labor of gender with adjustments" of her cuffs, jacket collars, necktie and her crotch (Dolan 2001: 470). Shaw's menopausal body messes up and confines her (masculine) gender presentations like "bumps on the outside" of the suit.<sup>23</sup> Hence, she has to spend a lot of time being a gentleman and cannot but endure the displeasure and inconvenience of an older woman enacting a gentleman – a constant "doing" of gender. Shaw depicts the conflict between the inside and outside: "The inside of my body seems so fragile. I

---

<sup>23</sup> Shaw says, "Inside, I'm all strapped down cause you can't have a great suit like this and have bumps on the outside" (*MG*).

was always afraid to put my fingers inside me. Funny how women's sex is on the inside, men's is on the outside. [. . .] This body is inside this suit. This suit gives you an idea of what I feel like" (*MG*). Shaw approaches the right wall of the stage, leans her right arm on the wall, and puts her left hand in the pocket of her pants. In this casual and relaxed masculine pose, she continues, "The reason why I like the word gentleman is how refined and detailed and consistent it is. The opposite of how I feel. I'm erratic on the inside and I try to be consistent on the outside, so that I appear normal." As such, she feels at home not in her female body but in her performance of masculinity (gentlemanliness). Her gender identity is constructed not by who she is (being), but by what she feels like and by what she performs.

Shaw touches on women's sexuality in relation to penetration, contrasting the fragile female body with solid masculinity. As she says, "I was always afraid to put my fingers inside me," she implicitly expresses her unwillingness to be penetrated and to take "women's sex on the inside" (*MG*). It is clear that she shares her speculation about the vulnerability and insecurity of the female body or femininity with the older butch generation. Jeanne Cordova says that "If the butch psyche doesn't want to identify as female, then penetration seems an unnatural act. See, penetration goes with that whole 'I'm being taken' idea" (Burana 116). Cherríe Moraga's butch desire also concurs with Shaw's inside fragility: "Nobody wants to be made to feel the turtle with its underside all exposed, just pink and folded flesh. [. . .] In the effort not to feel fucked, I became the fucker" (qtd. in Cvetkovich 70). Moraga's butch fantasy originates from the desire to maintain control and to capture, which keeps her protected (Hollibaugh and Moraga 249). In Shaw's inside/outside configurations, gender display in control is aligned with sexual

control, which confirms the traditional definition of butchness. As queer theatre artist/writer S. Bear Bergman epitomizes butch sexuality in *Butch Is a Noun*,

Butches are not supposed to like get fucked. We are not supposed to admit, with words or by deed, that there is any place in our sealed, concealed bodies, in our seamless identities, which could be penetrated. [. . .] Butch sexuality is about focusing our attention outward, remaining composed and in control. (152)

The “sealed” butch body ruptures the cultural premise of the leaking female body and is perceived as solid as the male body. However, as a younger generation butch, Bergman himself revises butchness by affirming that “getting fucked” is an element of butch desire.<sup>24</sup> It seems to me that unlike Bergman, Shaw adheres to the outward direction of the traditional butch sexuality. As Shaw feels more vulnerable with her body due to her menopause, she connects the insecurity and vulnerability of the female body to being penetrated and her butch sexuality to masculinity in control.

In contrast with her uncontrollable inside, Shaw demonstrates how much she enjoys being a consistent, neat gentleman on the outside in the scene where she sings “Brand New Suit.” This is evidence of how she “keeps young by passing as a man.” As swing trumpet music plays, she does twisting dance moves in delight, shaking her palms toward the audience, and flaunting her refined masculinity (“suit, tap shoes, vest,

---

<sup>24</sup> Bergman writes that opening hir up, making a space in hir “where there wasn’t one before” is worthwhile because it frees hir from limited concepts of what a real butch is and helps hir surrender to vulnerability in sex without self-consciousness (153). Bergman uses gender neutral pronouns, “ze/hir” to indicate hirself.

stick pin, tie...etc.”).<sup>25</sup> In the meantime, she stands aside, changing her direction left to right in turn and says proudly that when her friend calls her “dad” and tells Shaw, “Thanks, dad,” she replies to the friend, “You’re welcome, son.” Shaw lowers her voice to sound like a very manly father. The menopausal woman in the brand new suit happily plays a role of a queer father. However, while she exhausts her own body on stage and fights her erratic inside, her brand new suit jacket and tie tangle, and her starched shirt is drenched in sweat. She materializes her hard effort to be a gentleman during the performance and proves her words physically that “an older woman being a gentleman is not funny.” To emphasize her hard labor to be a gentleman, adjusting her outfit, she speaks very fast with a determined attitude, “Being a gentleman, Being a gentleman is very . . . Being a gentleman is very important to me.” Finally, Shaw says, “I’m a brand new girl,” fixing her necktie. This ironic statement suggests a new woman subject (gentleman in menopause). The brand new girl echoes Marjorie Garber’s “a Third” subject as a cross-dresser who “offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’”(10). Shaw’s enactment of Frank Sinatra crooning “My Way” with her menopausal body beautifully exemplifies “a Third” subjectivity.

While she recites the lyrics accompanied by the instrumental music to “My Way,” she moves out amongst the members of the audience, shakes hands with them, and pats them on their backs. Coincidentally, the lyrics connect to her recollection of her life, as a butch gentleman in menopause:

---

<sup>25</sup> In this scene, the script indicates that she “dances as if it’s a memory from the 1930’s Jimmy Durante/Fred Astaire combo.”

And now  
the end is near  
it's time to face the final curtain [. . .]  
I've lived a life that's full  
I've traveled each and every highway [. . .]  
I did what I had to do [. . .]  
I faced it all [. . .]  
I've loved, I've laughed and cried [. . .]  
I did it my way.

Shaw embraces all the ambiguities of her midlife that wears a “brand new suit,” but possessed by the menopausal spell, and she generously shares them with audiences. Through her enactment of Sinatra’s “My Way,” Shaw makes it explicit that “masculinity is an artifice no matter who performs it” (Solomon 168). The repertoire of a male crooner is reappropriated by the new brand girl – a Third subject – as a butch farewell song that is dedicated to her lost eggs and the end of her bleeding. Shaw’s rendition of “My Way” conveys her contemplation on the ebb and flow of a female gentleman’s queer life. It also claims that Shaw’s butch identity and Third subjectivity have empowered her agency in order to “do it her way.”

Like in the mini flashlights dance, Shaw intensely illustrates the alienation from her aging female body throughout *MG*. Many women in menopause are angry because “their bodies hurt and require constant monitoring” (Penelope 132). In one scene, she talks to her body parts in order to soothe herself, from her toes to her brain, which crystallizes her frustration with her alienated body. She lies on the bench and tries to

relax her body, but her head is still strained, remaining slightly lifted from the bench. Because of her “erratic inside,” she cannot control her body. At last, she talks to her brain, “Hello brain, yes, Sleep like everyone else, come on brain, [. . .] [y]ou can try brain, can’t you? I know I don’t have any health insurance, it’s o.k., I’m not gonna get sick.” Shaw insinuates that economic difficulty increases her anxieties and concerns of dealing with aging-related health issues. As she fails to relax her brain, she smacks the different parts of her body with her hands in rage and despair. Shaw’s menopausal body is a rebellious other or stranger to her. In this scene, the bench (in the street) on center stage becomes a bed in her room. Simultaneously, her neat, public outside (butch gentleman) collides with her inner turmoil (insomnia in the dark).<sup>26</sup> Finally, whenever she shouts in frustration, “night flashes!,” “hot nights!,” “sweaty clothes!,” and “the menopause blues!,” she lifts her arms up to the shoulder and bends herself backward as if she is ruthlessly being beaten by someone. The menopausal changes assault and torture her.

Shaw’s painful sense of alienation from her menopausal body culminates in a wild, scary lip-synch to Screaming’ Jay Hawkins’ “I Put a Spell on You.” When the music begins, an invisible force controls her body. Her face is awry in pain, and she staggers, writhes in agony, and is dragged forward. As she lip-syncs the lyrics, “I put a spell on you because you’re mine. [. . .] Stop the things you do. [. . .] I DON’T CARE IF YOU DON’T WANT ME I’M YOURS,” Shaw looks captured by somebody. In this scene, Shaw represents her menopause as total uncontrollability, a dreadful spell

---

<sup>26</sup> She says, “On the street, I’m on the outside” (*MG*).

that forces her to “stop the things she does” (being a gentleman). She struggles with the pulling force, but her resistance is useless. Meanwhile, she takes off her suit jacket and wears it backward, but she performs it as if the suit jacket is stripped off by a possessor who puts a spell on her. This literal wrestling with her own (female) body in a man’s suit articulates and encapsulates her gender dysphoria.<sup>27</sup>

Paradoxically, Shaw’s inside demands a greater labor of doing gender and hence, her menopausal body spotlights the performative nature of masculinity. She proves that “the ‘reality’ of gender is constituted by the performance itself” (Butler 1990: 278). Shaw’s obsessive and conscious gestures to adjust her outfit foreground Butler’s concept of gender as a “stylized repetition of acts” and underline that one becomes a man by “embodying and wearing certain cultural significations” (1990: 270, 272). In *MG*, Shaw borrows and sports the iconic gentlemanliness of black singer Barry White (romantic, suave masculinity), white singer/comedian Jimmy Durante (jokes and hilarity), and Sinatra (cool crooner/gentlemanliness). Her own butch/gentleman masculinity becomes an amalgamation of these cultural figures.

However, Shaw calls gender performativity into question by simultaneously making essentialist and constructionist statements of butchness. She repeats the following lines in *Belle Reprieve*, *You’re Just Like My Father*, and *MG*.<sup>28</sup>

I was born this way.

---

<sup>27</sup> Originally, “gender dysphoria” was a pathological term. Halberstam redefines and reclaims it for female masculinity, and I use this term to describe the discordance between femaleness and masculinity or a sense of gender-unbelonging, without any negative connotation.

<sup>28</sup> She seems to think that this soliloquy epitomizes her configuration of butchness, which oscillates between artificiality and authenticity of gender.

I didn't learn it at theatre school. I was born butch. I'm so queer I don't even have to talk about it, it speaks for itself. [. . .]

I fall to pieces in the night. I'm just thousands of parts of other people mashed into one body. I am not an original person. [. . .]

I manufacture myself.

Shaw's remarks on her butch identity seem to contradict themselves. Manufacturing gender and putting together pieces of people reify Butler's idea above. However, Shaw also employs a kind of butch essentialism with "I was born butch." This seemingly contradictory statement creates a tension in the performance. Even if she insists that she was born butch, what she constantly demonstrates is the labor of gender (Dolan 2001: 470). Shaw's comment on butchness or (female) masculinity complicates the notion of gender performativity as "regulatory fiction" and butch as a "role" player. The emphasis on an "artifice" or "style" of performative gender theory might ignore that gendering can be embodied as an authentic extension of a core self and overlook the historical specificity of butch practices (Weston 8, 10). In this respect, it seems to me that the line "I was born butch" reclaims a certain kind of embodiment or lived experience of butchness that cannot be reduced to just a "style" or "role." I would name it a constructed nature or created essence. Moreover, Shaw's recourse to inherent butchness counteracts the discrediting of female masculinity as "not real" or "derivative."

Analyzing Shaw's "I was born butch" monologue, Alisa Solomon articulates the dialectic between "being born" and "manufacturing":

It is not easy to draw a line between authenticity and artificiality [. . .].

To say that butchness is consciously constructed at times is not to say that

it can be easily thrown off or that it's as simple as putting on a leather jacket and boots. [. . .] [t]he roles are established as a layered system of signs, created by the piling on of pieces from popular culture. [. . .] Butch and femme are not just the costume; but they're nothing without the costume and borrowed gestures and mannerism. (169, 170 and 176)

Solomon's interpretation pointedly elucidates Shaw's intentional ambivalence between essentialism and social constructionism of gender. Returning to her words, "I am not an original person," Shaw is not an original person in that she borrows gestures and mannerisms from popular male figures. However, since her butchness has been embodied over time, it cannot be reduced to just "the costume" and cannot be taken off or put on like a fashion style or a theatrical role.

Faced by the awareness of mortality, many aging women come to feel a sense of urgency, and to look back on their past in times of loss, both of which might lead to emotional turmoil. Joann Loulan describes midlife as the time when women come to believe that their life is not a dress rehearsal (1991: 16). Indeed, midlife brings women the dual visions of hindsight and foresight (Butler 1995 "Circles and Rings": 73). Likewise, Shaw's physical effects of menopause are transferred to the emotional level and affect her inner life. As Jean Moutaingrove writes in the article, "Hot Flash to Warm Glow," menopause yields "profound changes in our interests, focus, direction, and aspirations" (62). Coping with mixed feelings and perils of her midlife in menopause, Shaw encounters a great deal of emotional vulnerability, which transforms her perspectives on love and life.

As Shaw goes through mood-swings and emotional extremes due to menopause

and the crisis of her midlife, her restrained feelings desperately need an outlet. As a performer, she can find a public space (the stage) to expose her butch feelings. Considering that theatrical performance onstage is a very emotive activity, it can be said that Shaw has a safe place to exhibit her effusive feeling in an art form without jeopardizing her butch identity. Since emotionality is allowed and further encouraged as a virtue of a performer, emotional vulnerability rarely damages masculinity in the theatre. Accordingly, her butch emotion can be incorporated in her art as a public commentary, and her emotional vulnerability in contrast with outward toughness produces a new (female) masculinity.<sup>29</sup> It is believed that the butch expresses emotion safely only in a bedroom (a private space), or that they externalize feelings without an audience (Cvetkovich 69). However, Shaw integrates her butch feelings into the performance of aging butch masculinity, which enables her to come out of the emotional (butch) closet. For Shaw, the stage is a place where the private and public merge.

It is crucial to note that Shaw's butch feelings center around her femme lover. She says, "When I pull myself back together again with the morning light, I'll think of you and who you want me to be." This illustrates that Shaw's gentlemanliness is also constituted by the needs of her femme lover, and that a butch gentleman needs a femme audience. The line supports that "the butch-femme couple inhabits the subject position together," and they are not discrete, split subjects (Case 1993: 295). This inseparable

---

<sup>29</sup> In "Conversation with a Gentleman Butch," Cordova asserts, "Emotional vulnerability is real [sic] important. [. . .] I encourage butches to go out and develop some kind of femme inside themselves and then put it into their butch identity" (Burana 117).

inter-subjectivity of the butch-femme reminds of me the scene in *The L Word*<sup>30</sup> where the white drag king, Ivan, does a private lip-sync for the black straight woman, Kit, to Leonard Cohen's "I'm Your Man." Ivan proposes that she would be a "lover, partner, boxer, doctor, driver, and a father for your child," depending on who Kit wants her to be. The lyrics of "I'm Your Man" and Ivan's lip-sync coincide with Shaw's wish for putting together her pieces to satisfy her femme's demand.

Such an inter-dependent subject formation of the butch-femme redefines the relations of gender presentation and sexuality in connection with the notions of femininity and masculinity. Shaw misses her femme lover ("you") in the scene when she speaks the lyrics accompanied by the piano music of "Ne Me Quitte Pas (Don't Leave Me)" in sorrow and desperation. She stands center stage, stretching both hands in front of her as if she strives to seize her leaving lover, and exclaims:

Goodbyes dripping over my mouth. [. . .]

I can yell to you across the street. [. . .]

You've already gone. You're not turning around. [. . .]

What time is it?

I don't remember because every time I try, tears come.

Don't leave me! Don't leave me!! Don't leave me!!!

Shaw depicts herself as the butch who waits for her lover to turn around and weeps at her loss. She immerses herself in emotional vulnerability and presents it to the audience.

In his interview with Shaw, Craig Lucas asks Shaw if "Don't leave me" is related to her

---

<sup>30</sup> *The L Word* is the first American television series about lesbians, which debuted in 2004 on the Showtime cable channel.

lost eggs, but Shaw answers that it was a coincident choice (Lucas). Although Shaw did not intend to mean the loss of eggs through “Ne Me Quitte Pas,” the audience may still find resonance in an analogy between the lover who left her and feelings of loss inspired by menopause. Just as she cannot regain her lost blood and eggs, so her lover does not turn around any more. Her heart is in agony with parting from the irretrievable.

As Shaw takes an earnest oath of love to keep her lover, her fervent feeling is heightened.

I will make you a land where there is only love.

I will buy a house!! And stand outside and protect you from everything bad that could ever happen to you.

I will take you to an island where there is a dormant volcano and it will rise up again. [. . .]

I will do anything

Please don't go

I will be the shadow of your shadow [. . .]

Don't leave me!

Shaw's promise to protect her lover is a form of butch chivalry; she pleads for her lover to stay with her. The “dormant volcano” symbolizes her menopausal state, a feeling of loss, and yearning for rejuvenation. Her butch desire as a provider/giver becomes extreme in the phrase “the shadow of your shadow”; she voluntarily takes a submissive position and humbles herself.

In considering the contrast between Shaw's masculinity and her emotional effusiveness, Butler's idea of “inverted” relations of gender presentation and sexuality

provides a very appropriate explanation:

First, it is necessary to consider that sexuality always exceeds any given performance, presentation, or narrative which is why it is not possible to derive or read off a sexuality from any given gender presentation. [. . .] [t]here will be passive and butchy femmes, femmy and aggressive butches, and both of those, and more. [. . .] [s]exuality is to some degree always closeted. [. . .] [b]oth gender presentation and sexual practices [. . .] are jointly constituted by the very sexual possibilities that they exclude.

(Butler 1991: 25)

Resting on the concept of inverted relations, Butler argues that the butch's "providingness" turns to a self-sacrifice or self-abnegation, and finally, the butch inverts into the femme (ibid). That is, the inverted relation implies that butch chivalry and sexual responsibility coupled with sexual desire appropriate a femme's caring traits. The butch's willingness to "do anything" for the femme is embedded in inverted possibilities to resignify the voluntary submissive role of the provider. Although it remains controversial that self-sacrifice and emotional inclination are attributed to the feminine, Butler's contention brings to light complicated and multiple butch-femme practices that exceed appearances. The inverted dynamics of the butch-femme account for how Shaw's toughness is compatible with emotional dependency. Her gentleman persona "provides a poignant cover of a tender heart" (Ferguson 375). By performing a masculinity that includes emotional vulnerability, Shaw implicitly critiques the old-fashioned idea that the emotionality of butches undermines their masculinity.

Toward the end of the play, there is a scene where she drinks a bottle of water while Tony Child's "Where's the Ocean" plays, which encapsulates her loss and longing.<sup>31</sup> As the music plays, Shaw puts her hand on her forehead and lets her hand pass over her face and neck as if she feels thirsty. Then, she unbuttons her dress shirt, loosens her necktie, and approaches the bench. She drinks a bottle of water for a while, standing aside. In this scene, Shaw metaphorically quenches her thirst for love. It feels like the sea water of love saturates her "dried bones," and she conjures up the ocean of love so that her lover comes back and dives into her, again.

Menopausal changes aggravate her loneliness because of insomnia. Even though she is with her lover, in fact, she is alone. After she drinks water, she sits on the bench, quietly removes the mini flashlights from her ankles, and mops the sweat off her face with her handkerchief. Shaw says that the sweat forces her to sleep alone. She describes her lonely, sleepless night: "I stayed up all night thinking and counting your breaths. I was surprised that my longing didn't wake you." Her loneliness with night sweats evidences how physical symptoms of menopause affect her emotion.

Throughout *MG*, Shaw sets in opposition "loneliness in the dark" and "love in the light." In the scene where she speaks of "being loved in fluorescent light," she specifies her point of view on true love. Shaw sits on the bench, putting her feet on the bench and hugging her knees toward her chest. She says, mopping the sweat off of her face:

I want the truth, want true love in details. I'm not satisfied with  
generalities now that time is passing so fast. [. . .]

---

<sup>31</sup> In this scene, she does not lip-sync the song; it only plays as background music as the scene continues.

I want to be loved in fluorescent light. [. . .] I wanna be naked in that kinda blue, flickering, kinda ugly exposed feeling of that cheap hallway light.

I want to be loved in this light that shows lumps in my legs and the stretch marks on my belly, cause then I'll know I've been loved.

According to Lucas, Shaw came up with these lines when thinking of the fluorescent light of the WOW Café hallway in New York. She remarks, "I was down there one night [. . .] thinking how extraordinary it is seeing people in that kind of light, and thinking about having been with Lois for so many years, and the opposite of romance" (Lucas). Shaw muses on love in her midlife, using "light" as a theme and metaphor for her real life experiences: working at the WOW Café and her partnership (for both work and love) with Lois Weaver. In particular, when she says, "I want to be loved in cheap light. My love is cheap, I make it as cheap I can," it sounds very touching and lovely to me. Her words remind me of my own spatial experience of the WOW Café, the humble but very meaningful place in lesbian/feminist theatre. Shaw's "cheap love" somehow bears her working-class philosophy of love with humility and unaffectedness: "cheap but truthful."<sup>32</sup> Illuminating the truth is like exposing her lumps, stretch marks, and blue veins and surrendering to her incomplete life. When she says, "It's sexy to see the truth. Blue veins under my skin is [sic] a real turn-on," she embraces the truth of her present – that she has become a menopausal gentleman – and finds her eroticism in it.

It is evident that aging and menopause transform her views on life. Shaw draws together "true love" and the "truth in details" and explains that she needs lots of light to

---

<sup>32</sup> In reference to her words, "I want the truth, true love in details. [. . .] My love is cheap."

see the details. The reason why she wants truth in details is that she is aware of urgency and finiteness of life. She adds, “I’m going to feel all the emotions I’ve postponed so far in my life.” Shaw discloses that she used to suppress emotions, but now she unlocks the emotional closet and fully inhabits her menopausal body. “Wanting to be naked in the cheap light” is linked to the exposure of her feelings, which finally leads her to exhibit her desire to “be loved” as a butch.

In the final scene, she again employs the metaphor of light/darkness through Nina Simone’s “Turn Me On.” Shaw sings the song, gazing into the distance, as if waiting for someone. But it does not sound romantic because she sings unskillfully in her raw and loud voice with an exaggerated manner. Rather, it elicits an almost lonesome sadness.<sup>33</sup>

Like a flower, waiting to bloom

Like a light bulb in a dark room [ . . . ]

Like a desert waiting for rain [ . . . ]

I’m sitting here waiting for you to come back home and turn me on

My poor heart it’s been so dark

since you’ve been gone

after all you’re the one that turned me off

Now you’re the only one that can turn me back on

“A light bulb in a dark room” resonates with her menopausal loneliness, and “turn me on” makes a connection between sexual arousal and “the light for details.”

---

<sup>33</sup> I will discuss Shaw’s singing style and its effects in detail in my analysis of her singing “I Feel Good” in *To My Chagrin*.

Furthermore, by identifying with a flower, a light bulb, and a desert, Shaw not only renders Simone's heterosexual song as a lesbian menopausal blues number but also subverts the butch role as a giver or sexual initiator. In Shaw's rendition, it is the femme who makes a flower bloom, turns on a light bulb, and rains on a desert. Her masculine outfit and attitude contrast with the passive lyrics. Shaw is a butch gentleman waiting for her femme lady to come back home and turn her on.

As a butch lesbian, Shaw "reveals many ways in which vulnerability can be performed" (Cvetkovich 81). The ways to perform butch vulnerability call attention to the fact that the butch-femme dyad is deployed in a multitude of meanings, contexts, uses and practices by individual agents. Shaw's heart underneath her gentleman's suit invites us to an alternative understanding of the dualistic configuration of femininity and masculinity, a giver and a taker in the butch-femme couple.

Like its oxymoronic title *Menopausal Gentleman*, the play condenses diverse contradictions of Shaw's midlife in menopause. In an interview, she displays an exhilarating and exhausting experience of her midlife: "I had more desire than before, I was wetter than ever. I was smarter, but for the first time in my life, nothing worked for me. I was totally depressed" (Palmer). She does not romanticize or idealize menopause and does not put her experiences of menopause and aging in the conventional frames. Shaw faces and embraces all the changes and takes advantage of them in order to contemplate her aging butchness and wisdom of life. An old lesbian's insightful comments on her menopause in the book *Zest for Life*<sup>34</sup> echo Shaw's efforts to

---

<sup>34</sup> Annie, whose last name is unidentified in the book, is one of the many lesbians that Jennifer Kelly interviewed to study lesbian's experiences of menopause.

make sense of her midlife in *MG*.

[E]ven if an apple does get dried up, all you have to do is put it in water, and it will be hydrated. [. . .] I did dry up, metaphorically, just like a dried-up apple, but then when I came to a different part of my life and was re-hydrated by the love and nurture of others [. . .] I'm all juicy again. [. . .] Our eyes don't dry up, our saliva doesn't dry up, and our cunts don't dry up. (Kelly 58)

As Shaw drains a bottle of water in order to reach the sea of love, yearns to be loved in bright light, and waits for rain like a desert, she continues to re-hydrate her dried life with desire, love, longing, and even tears.

Shaw's multiple positions and backgrounds as a working-class/butch/grandmother/feminist/queer performance artist produce a very special butch subjectivity. Since she gave birth to a baby, has (grand)mothered, and pours out butch emotions, she strays from the old-fashioned, typical butch category and has complicated relationships to femaleness/maleness and femininity/masculinity. It is pertinent to consider the relationship between her butchness and male masculinity in terms of Halberstam's "active disidentification." Halberstam notes that "[butch] masculinity is neither assimilated into maleness nor opposed to it: rather it involves an active disidentification with dominant forms of masculinity, which are subsequently recycled into alternative masculinities" (1998: 248). Following José Muñoz, Halberstam accounts for butch masculinity on the grounds that it is a mode of dealing with dominant ideology within the creative contradictions between assimilation and opposition. At the same time, Shaw maintains a tension with her femaleness through the equivalent disidentification with it

by choosing female reproduction, but struggling with her menopausal body. She multiplies the contradiction of femaleness with masculinity and proceeds to “the evolution out of old-fashioned, biology-bound gender” (Newton 94). Shaw’s ongoing process of active disidentification destabilizes fixed, binary categories of femaleness/maleness and femininity/masculinity.

Shaw creates her tiger to figure out her changes and to reconcile the conflict between menopause and masculinity. She accentuates the constructed nature of masculinity by doing the arduous labor of being a gentleman. Finally, she pulls her vulnerable heart (replete with feelings of loss and longing) out of the butch closet. As such, Shaw’s *MG* demonstrates that “menopause can be understood not merely in terms of physiological processes but also in conjunction with the motifs of disruptions at the levels of biology, social relationships, sexuality, and values” (Komesaroff et al 12). As a butch, gentleman, feminist, and a performer, Shaw charts “heRrr own way of menopaws” [sic] and expands the range of aging butchness in relation to gender, sexuality, and emotion. Therefore, despite her physical aging, Shaw’s tiger will always stay young and wild, and her butch Sinatra will sing for and flirt with her ladies, and flowers in her heart will keep blooming because of her yearning for love.

### **To My Chagrin: A Butch Grandma’s Queer Lullaby**<sup>35</sup>

I make performance and theatre, for those interested in hearing the poetry or point of view of a 60 plus year old, second generation Irish, working-class, grand butch mother. I have been described as masculine.

---

<sup>35</sup> I am very grateful to professor Dolan for giving me a copy of the 2003 unpublished script and to Paul Bonin-Rodriguez for giving me a videotape of the performance at Jump-Start Performance Co. in San Antonio in 2001.

Actually I am a new kind of femininity. I am interested in testing masculine-feminine and butch-femme as markers.

— Peggy Shaw<sup>36</sup>

In *To My Chagrin (TMC)*, Shaw meditates on her aging white butchness and articulates her love for her half-Jamaican grandson and her passion for cars. According to the Haitian writer Edwige Danticat, the term “chagrin” refers to an illness of the heart, and also means a longing, keening, and missing (Perille).<sup>37</sup> As a white, working-class, butch grandmother, Shaw’s chagrin speaks of race/racism, masculinity and femininity, a ritual of being in the ground, and passing on butch masculinity, all in tune with black rock’n roll and soul music.

By thinking of her relationship with her black mixed-race grandson, Shaw’s whiteness is foregrounded and underlined. Historically, whiteness has been an unmarked, universal category, a norm or an essence. However, many critics and scholars indicate that “linking the power of white culture with the privilege not to be named” (Frankenberg 197) and the association of “ubiquitous hidden ‘whiteness’ with an unmarked superiority” have legitimized white supremacy (Keating 904). Shaw strives to name and mark her whiteness in order to reflect on it. Kate Davy suggests that “whiteness should be ‘outed’” to examine constructed whiteness (204). Shaw’s deconstruction of whiteness involves the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and race. Making whiteness visible in relation to other social markers and constructs is vital in “questioning and delimiting authority of whiteness” (Frankenberg 234). As Shaw

---

<sup>36</sup> From her description of her own art after she became a recipient of an award from The Foundation for Contemporary Arts, <[http://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/grant\\_recipients/peggyshaw.html](http://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/grant_recipients/peggyshaw.html)>.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw says, “I always suffered from a disease that I could never name.” She titled the show, inspired by Danticat’s book and her heart disease (Perille).

demystifies her whiteness, her queer working-class butchness underneath her white skin is revealed. Sealed whiteness is taken apart into pieces at the crossroads of other social identities.

In this context, Marilyn Frye's concept "whiteness" is instrumental in understanding Shaw's performative strategy in *TMC*. Frye establishes the analogy between "whiteness" and "manliness" as social constructs.

Being white is not a biological condition. It is being a member of a certain social/political category. [. . .] It is like being a member of a political party, or a club, or a fraternity. [. . .] Your membership in it is in a way, or to a degree, compulsory [. . .] but it is contingent and, in the Aristotelian sense, accidental. [. . .] We need a term in the realm of race and racism whose grammar is analogous to the grammar of the term 'masculinity.' [. . .] So I will introduce 'whitely' and 'whiteness' as terms whose grammar is analogous to that of 'masculine' and 'masculinity.' (149-151)

Shaw's *TMC* illuminates the constructedness of whiteness and masculinity at the same time by performing self-reflective white butchness. Her theatrical exploration revolves around unlearning whiteness and femininity, and she demonstrates that her white race and femaleness do not ensure whitely femininity.

Shaw's out butchness and queer gender must be understood in terms of her working-class background. While hegemonic, institutionalized whiteness is saturated with middle-classness as "an ideal of whiteness or an epitome of whiteness" (Davy 202), it is necessary to note that Shaw's outing whiteness facilitates coming out of the (queer)

working-class closet. Responding to the question, “What is one of the most unexpected influences on your art?” Shaw answers, “Being dirt poor, being working class, having nothing to lose.”<sup>38</sup> Her working-class background has deeply influenced her butch identity, sex-positive queer politics, and her performance work. As Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis report in a study of working-class bar culture in Buffalo in the 1940s and 1950s, butch/fem was an organizing system to create space for working-class lesbian communities, and butchness was a “working-class act of subversion” to defy dominant gender norms (Crawley 179, 183). Shaw makes it clear that she was affected by a working-class lesbian bar culture in the 1960s and 1970s before she encountered a feminist culture and community.<sup>39</sup> She keeps bringing class references in *TMC* through her body movements/gestures, stories about her childhood and family, and explicit statements about “being inbred.” Her performance of queer working-class identity challenges stereotypes of working-class people as backward rednecks and unenlightened homophobes. It can be argued that Shaw’s over-the-top butchness is a critical comment on the moralistic respectability, decorum, and propriety of the upper- and middle-class white lesbian-feminist culture that stigmatizes butch/fem as the working-class culture.

Like Shaw, some lesbian writers have attempted to voice issues pertaining to working-class lesbianism and to articulate how the discourses of class are linked to the discourses of proper sexuality (Allison *Trash* 1988 and *Skin* 1994; Kadi 1996; Sandell

---

<sup>38</sup> In The Walter Art Center interview.

<<http://performingarts.walterart.org/detail.wac?id=2039&tittle=Articles>>. Shaw delineates her childhood in the Irish working-class family, “[R]eally poor working class, too many kids, too young, beat us, beat beat beat beat” (Lucas) and “I’d come home from school and nobody would ever mention it” (Cragin).

<sup>39</sup> In a Q & A session with Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw in the department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin on Apr 22, 2005.

1997). Joanna Kadi's reappropriation of queerness in connection with working-class status echoes Shaw's sexual courage, gender transgression, and anti-assimilationist, queer politics. She writes:

[I]'m also intrigued by the word "queer" and possible association between class identity and sexual identity. [. . .] Today the word queer captures not only my sexual identity, but my class identity as well. It accurately positions me on the margins of the class hierarchy, without any chance of being "normal," that is, middle-class. And the in-your-face power of this word speaks to the pride I experience from my class identity. (145-146)

In the autobiographical essay "Gosh Dirt," Shaw laments that she cannot be thrilled anymore by a gay world because it seems to be only concerned with legal same-sex marriage (Shaw 2003: 235). By inhabiting critical marginality, she refuses to be "normal" through institutional gay marriage. I am not suggesting that all working class people are inherently progressive. Rather, I want to highlight ways in which Shaw's sexuality and class identity are constructed as "falling outside the normative (and overlapping) moral orders of the middle-classes and the queer community" (Sandell 216). It seems to me that as a material and cultural foundation, the "having nothing to lose" of working-classness fuels Shaw's radicalism of gender, sexuality, art, and politics.

Shaw's butchness and working-class identity are also manifested through her body, which is connected to the physical strength of white working-class masculinity. Eric Lott indicates that working-class machismo and hard-bitten manliness rest on "self-fashioning of social puissance through physical assertion" and resourcefulness, "valorizing a life of manual labor" (195, 216). Indeed, many working-class people

believe that the body is the only resource on which they can count. Shaw's muscled body was built not by a commercialized queer gym culture or by taking testosterone but by many years of manual labor and physical hard work. She attaches importance to the body in the unique combination of being working-class and a performance artist:

You can always rely on your body for memory instead of your mind.

Your body will tell you the right thing. That's the way I've learned theatre—by being told to trust my stories [. . .] but also to trust my body, that when it moves and I make a sound, whatever comes out is the truth, or the first thing that comes out is the most creative thing even if it sounds wrong or stupid or not politically correct or boring. (Lucas)

In performing her butchness, Shaw frequently exerts physical strength and displays energetic body movements, although she is over sixty-years-old. As a queer, white, working-class performance artist, Shaw's trust in her body thwarts the mystification of whiteness as anti-body. Richard Dyer observes that whiteness represents rationality, rigidity, order, over-investment in the brain, acts of control, and the ability to repress life whereas emotion, sensuality, and proximity to nature are assigned to blackness (qtd. in Davy 196). Interestingly, Shaw's reliance on her working-class body rather than her mind overlaps with her inspiration through her body as a performance artist. Shaw's commentary on the body and Dyer's analysis of white brain vs. black sensuality elucidate why middle-class people tend to be taught to repress their sexuality, and how middle-classness is conflated with general whiteness. As such, I have discussed the implications of the interlocking of Shaw's class, gender, sexuality, and race in unmasking whiteness in order to contextualize *TMC*. In the following section, through critical

analysis of the performance video and a close reading of the script, I examine how she embodies the interlocking in performing an aging, white, working-class masculinity. As I focus on how female masculinity is conceived and performed in the interplay of other social vectors, I concentrate on scenes in which she contemplates whiteness/racism, class, femininity/masculinity, aging, and butch grandmotherhood. The scenes include stories of a fallen old tree, cars, covering her naked body with dirt, marking whiteness, and teaching her grandson to drive.

In *TMC*, cars function as a key metaphor, which signifies Shaw's butchy love of cars and the common ground on which masculinity is passed. The car spotlights and frames "the *auto* part of autobiography" in her theatrical memoir (Cragin). The stage is set with a dissected, rusted-out, baby blue 1977 Chevrolet Luv pickup truck. The cab sits on stage right, and the driver's side window faces toward the audience. The bed of the truck is set stage left as the platform for the collaborating percussionist Vivian Stoll and her drum set. Stoll sits facing the audience in the bed. Considering that the drum is regarded as a fairly masculine instrument, Stoll's drumming infuses Shaw's butch story with masculine beats, rhythms, and energy. The torn car bumper is tilted and barely hanging on, and the wheels and tires have been removed. Car sounds that are used in the performance were recorded from Shaw's own 1971 Ford Torino (Kulbokas). Shaw explains, "I listed my fantasies for the show and one of them was a truck . . . A truck is such a great image of working class masculinity" (Perille). In addition to the class connotation, the rusted-out old car is a masculine symbol of her aging and maturity.

After playing pre-show music of radio sounds mixed with car sounds, and the blinker light on the bed of the truck starts flashing in the dark, Shaw appears on stage

wearing a deep red, effervescent tuxedo jacket with a white shirt, black pants, and two-tone shoes in brown and beige. She stands facing Stoll in front of the blinking light, turning her back to the audience. Then she talks about the deaths of many black musicians like Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, and Otis Redding, relates rumors about their deaths, and describes racist prejudices toward black musicians.

I know that Otis Redding is dead [. . .]

I couldn't put the two sides of my life back together without him.

So I switched to James Brown and Wilson Pickett [. . .]

Little Black Sambo was the only black boy I knew till 8<sup>th</sup> grade [. . .]<sup>40</sup>

Shaw recognizes cultural influences from black music and implicitly situates a commonality between black musicians and her grandson through anti-racism toward black people, intimating her internalized racism. Although she was a big fan of black soul music, racist ideology (little black Sambo) has structured her notions of race and blackness and still lingers in her grandson's generation.<sup>41</sup> She continues:

Bessie Smith died 'cause they wouldn't treat her at a white-only  
Hospital emergency room. They turned her away.

Or was it Billie Holiday? [. . .]

I was lucky I didn't believe anything I was told.

I thought I was Scottish till my father died and everyone at the  
Funeral was Irish.

---

<sup>40</sup> An unpublished and unpaginated script of *TMC*.

<sup>41</sup> "The happy Negro" image of little black Sambo was developed in white racist imagery as an oppositional image of black slaves to "the dangerous savage" in order to justify black slavery and to alleviate racial fear of black people (Fredrickson 40).

I was told that Dinah Shore had defective genes that caused her to  
Give birth to two black children in a row.

Shaw sheds light on how racist prejudices are constructed and fabricated as “fact” or “truth,” and how anti-black racist ideology is disseminated in white supremacist miseducation and ignorance. Her confusion of her ethnicity between Scottish and Irish illustrates how racial/ethnic identity is often formulated according to “what we were told” or “what we believe,” rather than “what we are.” Suddenly, with a jump to the center stage, Shaw repeatedly shouts the refrain “Fa fa fa fa fa fa fa fa” of Otis Redding’s “Fa Fa Fa Fa (Sad Song)” with Stoll’s drumming, and she says, “Otis Redding has always been a backdrop of my emotion.” The reference to the refrain reminds me of black oppression and the historical baggage of racism that affects her mixed race grandson. Also, it points to the irony that cross-racial identification with black musicians does not prevent her internalized racism.

Shaw changes her subject to an old, big tree, which is another key metaphor in *TMC*. She makes an analogy between a fallen tree and her aging, and discovers her attraction to the hole of the uprooted tree. She writes in her story “Gosh Dirt” that as she gets “mature and dirty,” she wants to “withdraw, become quiet, and to retreat from the scene” (2003: 235). This detached mode corresponds to her feeling calm and safe in the hole as a sanctuary. Shaw faces toward the audience under the spotlight on stage left, stoops, holds her right arm down, and squeezes her right wrist with her left hand. She informs the audience that a high wind had blown down a 150-year-old-groovy-tree

and it smashed her backyard.<sup>42</sup> She lifts her squeezed wrist and her palm toward her face, describing the tree. Her right palm held by her left hand represents as her entire body and the fallen tree. She adds, “You were staring at my hands because I’m white and naked.”<sup>43</sup> When she explains, “The contents of the hole were exposed to us in full view,” the exposed hole is juxtaposed with deeply rooted racism and her excavation of internalized racism.

Shaw steps toward the audience on down left stage, buttons her jacket, and tells how it felt to be buried alive in the ground. Meanwhile, she runs her left hand through her hair slowly and repeatedly to slick it back, like a punctuation effect during her speech. Shaw describes that her “good angel” (mixed-race grandson, Ian) helped and witnessed her burying ritual, shoveling heavy wet dirt onto her cold, white body, and feeding a fire around her. All the facts and images that this white grandma “had stored up come out through the dirt and the hole,” and Ian was brought to look into them (2003 “Gosh Dirt”: 242).

With no clothes, and through your eyes, my body felt  
So feminine, so vulnerable,  
So female, very soft, very naked, and very white  
No fancy suit, no silk tie to protect me

---

<sup>42</sup> When she saw the hole, Shaw was reminded of a medicine woman’s advice for her: “bury yourself in the ground” and determined to practice it (2003 “Gosh Dirt”: 238).

<sup>43</sup> Shaw explains that people were staring at her hands because her one hand was poised on her waist, and the other hand was pressing on the trunk of the tree (2003 “Gosh Dirt”: 238). That is why she uses this hand gesture in this scene.

No polished shoes

No hair products

No attitude.<sup>44</sup>

The comparison between the black dirt and her white body parallels the contrast between outer masculinity and inner femaleness. Exposed whiteness is paralleled to her femaleness. Her naked body, as it unmasks whiteness, peacefully embraces and affirms her femaleness. When she talks about feeling feminine, her voice gets soft in tranquility. To unveil her whiteness, she is naked, a vulnerable state for a white, butch grandma; she uncovers embodied white racism, and also unclothes all the masculine protection. It seems that including her masculine gesture of running her hand through the hair, Shaw's butchness has safeguarded her vulnerable femaleness. However, by blackening her white naked body with the dirt while her mixed-race grandson watches, Shaw feels safe in the hole without masculine armor.

Shaw expands her musings on femininity and masculinity in the following conversation with Stoll about "hard shapes vs. soft shapes," which foregrounds her butch identity. As Stoll plays her drums softly, Shaw approaches her in the bed of the truck, puts her right leg on the edge of the tailgate, and lays down her right arm on her thigh. Facing Stoll, Shaw says to her, "Hard shapes. Cars are hard. Wood is hard. So you like soft shapes. Like circles." Stoll answers, "Yeah, but I don't like squares." Hard shapes imply her butchness, and by exemplifying cars as a representative hard-shaped thing, Shaw evokes the intimate relationship between her attachment to cars and

---

<sup>44</sup> *TMC*.

masculinity. She continues, “I was supposed to be a soft shape. But I didn’t stick around for soft. Soft is too cozy, too safe for me.” Shaw claims that she chose not to be a soft shape, dislodging femaleness from enforced femininity, and posits her butchness in the link between taking risks and masculinity. Moreover, as she addresses hard shapes and soft shapes around the car and on the hood, she magnifies the contrast between her femaleness (the female body) and masculinity (the car).

The opposition between square-hard shapes vs. circle-soft shapes is extended to the butch-fem dyad. She climbs up the hood of the truck and sits on the roof, looking at Stoll.

When I should be out being hard  
Fighting wars  
To protect my mom  
Or my girlfriend who was soft

Here, she discloses another reason why she maintains a hard shape. Softness is connected with femmeness as her counterpart, and to protect other women, she needs to be hard, as well as enact a sort of butch chivalry.<sup>45</sup> Shaw crosses her legs, unbuttons her jacket, spreads her arms, and puts her both hands on the roof. Then, she says seductively in a very femme pose and voice, “I have been accused of being masculine.” Immediately, she turns back to her ordinary butch attitude and brags,

I’ve had a lot of experience being man enough . . .

---

<sup>45</sup> She has portrayed a romantic relationship with her mother in the first piece of her butch trilogy, *You’re Just Like My Father* (1994). Also, since her father died young, and her mother, who was manic-depressive, would disappear for months at a time (Melo), it seems that Shaw felt a responsibility to take care of her mother.

Butch enough . . .

And fast

I have been a King, a Drag, a Racist

A He-Man, and a Confessor.

Shaw is accused of her hard-shaped manner (butchness) because she does not conform to “cultural norms about how women should act, behave, and dress” (Inness 1998: 234). She insinuates once more that driving a car fast is a crucial component of her manliness. Through her intentional femme gesture, instead of presenting a seamless male-identification, Shaw flirts with the boundary between femininity and masculinity. In an interview, Shaw clarifies, “I’m always in some kind of drag. Drag is the magic of theatre. People get excited when you appear one way and are another way. There is always the magic of some kind of drag or exposure or vulnerability” (Thomas). When she says, “I have been a Drag,” the word “drag” epitomizes her butch statement in a femme pose and underscores the affinity of queerness and theatricality.

However, by calling herself a racist, she reveals the other side of playful genders and the pleasure of drag. According to Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis, admitting internalized racism is a starting point to not being a racist.

All whites are racist [. . .] because we benefit from systemic white privilege. Generally whites think of racism as voluntary, intentional conduct, done by horrible others. Whites spend a lot of time trying to convince ourselves and each other that we are not racist. A big step would be for whites to admit that we are racist and then to consider what to do about it. (318)

For Shaw, naming herself a racist is a way to acknowledge her white privilege within a racist system. Also, she accentuates the contradiction between her queer working-class marginality and white privilege.

Her confession of being racist involves her relationship with Ian and her concerns about passing masculinity on to him. To begin with, Shaw explores a masculine lineage, recollecting her father. The lineage of masculinity is woven with working classness, queer gender, and racial mixture. She says proudly, grabbing her crotch like a man, “I got my big Adam’s apple from my dad.” And she tells the audience that her father smoked a lot, taught her how to drive, and made her carry her own weight, even when she was very young, saying, “Life is hard. You gotta be strong.” For Shaw, being a hard shape was a survival strategy to manage her tough working-class life. She squeezes her wrist and looks down her hand, explaining, “When I miss him, I hold my arm down, squeeze my wrist, and look at my veins in my hand.” Through her veins, her father’s legacy still flows in her body. Shaw’s hands are the place in which her past, her Irish working-class father, and her future, half-Jamaican grandson, Ian converge.<sup>46</sup>

Shaw has frequently put special emphasis on her hands in her performances and configured her hands as an essential vessel of butchness. In *You’re Just Like My Father*, Shaw states,

He [her father] had big hands. I have his big hands [. . .] My father told me that his father knocked out Joe Louis with his bare hands [. . .] My hands. These are the butch queer feminine parts of me [. . .] I associate

---

<sup>46</sup> In the following scene, Shaw personifies her hand as Ian.

everything with cars, except my sexuality I attribute to my hands. (1998: 183-184, 192)

In her words, her hands are the repository where lesbian desire as well as physical potency and manliness are preserved. That is, they are an amalgam of masculinity and femininity. What is interesting is that she elicits queer femininity from her big butch hands. Bergman's views on her own hands are amazingly similar to Shaw's queer signification of her hands. In *Butch Is a Noun*, Bergman writes:

Sometimes I think in my hands. They're big [. . .] big boy paws, big enough to hold two glasses in each. [. . .] They are hands that capably twist jars open, [. . .] twist nails out of wood, but also hold her so gently, soft enough to cradle a newborn [. . .] steady enough to make pleasure between. [. . .] Sometimes when I sit and think about where it is that my butch self begins, I feel the power and gentleness in my hands [. . .]. (81)

It is in power and gentleness that the queerness of a butch hand is produced. The butch hand bears both a hard-shaped and a soft-shaped aspect. It contains a handy, robust capability, and care-taking delicacy and sensuality. According to Shaw, she uses the words "butch" and "femme" just to add more words to the vocabulary of "masculinity" and "femininity," and to get away from the words "male" and "female" (DeLombard). As I quoted from her artistic statement at the beginning of this chapter, Shaw "tests masculine-feminine and butch-femme as markers" and reimagines a new kind of femininity through her queer butchness.

After she conjures up her father with her hands, Shaw's hands incarnate Ian. Sitting on the hood, Shaw raises her squeezed wrist toward her face and talks to Ian,

looking at her palm as if her palm is Ian: “Do you want me to be like you when I grow up?” you said. I know what I don’t want you to be. But I can’t tell you.” And she lists what she does not want Ian to be:

No doctor. No lawyer.

No baseball player. No inmate. No pimp. No criminal. No cop.

No illegal immigrant. No soldier.

Not in a junkyard. Not in a dead end job.

Not in the newspaper. Not on death row.

This butch, white grandmother wishes that her half-Jamaican grandson would have neither upper-class professional jobs nor stereotypical jobs assigned to lower-class black people. In doing so, Shaw suggests that racist prejudices assume the potential criminality of black people, and that the job market is still racially segregated and limited.

Closing the scene about her wishes for Ian, Shaw says to Stoll, “You’re lucky you were born at a time when girls could play drums. I’m lucky. With this amount of testosterone, I’ll never have balls.” Shaw wants to push the limits of socially prescribed gender norms. Although she feels good about her Adam’s apple that is “bigger than James Dean’s,” she does not want to have a male body (balls). She draws a clear line between her butch masculinity (gender transgression) and male-identification or body modification for maleness.

For Shaw, the car is the medium not only to share her masculine lineage but also to figure out her aging butchness. In this scene, the physical action in which Shaw struggles with starting the engine, and plays with a miniature car, encapsulates how she compares her aging to an old car and presents butch desire associated with her passion for

cars. Shaw opens the hood to check if there is any problem and closes it. Then, she sits on the driver's seat and wrestles with starting the engine, shaking her body fiercely. Her desperate efforts to turn on the power are indicative of her frustration, anger, and sadness that accompany her aging. Shaw's struggle with an old, weak engine represents her endeavor to reanimate her aging body. After failing several times, recorded car sounds signal that she finally starts the car. And then, she carefully gets off the car, afraid that the weak, malfunctioning engine will stop again. When she stands between the cab and the bed, she takes out a red miniature car from the inside pocket of her jacket. Shaw opens the bonnet to check inside, closes it, and blows the mini car with a whistling hand gesture as an effort to start the mini car, shaking her body along with background car sounds. As Shaw succeeds in starting it with recorded car sounds, she puts the car on her right arm and lets it pass over her body, grabbing it in her hand. She drives the mini car on her arms and head and holds it in her mouth. Again, the car passes from her breast to her crotch, leg, knee, and ankle to her foot. In this scene, the mini car acts as a charm to renew her body and to restore her libido. Lastly, she puts the car on the floor, pulls it back slightly, and lets it go. The mini car drives away in the dark.

The tiny car scene beautifully captures a queer/feminist car imaginary. Discussing auto(-mobile and -matic)/eroticism in feminist performance, Elin Diamond argues that Shaw's autoeroticism "annexes American automophilia for a female imaginary, refiguring the lives of girls and women not in private spaces, but on the erotic dream highways usually reserved for males" (1997:163).<sup>47</sup> The freedom of driving on

---

<sup>47</sup> Diamond analyzes Shaw's fetishism of a 1962 Corvette in *You're Just Like My Father*.

highways transfers to an erotic fetishism of the mini car on her body, and her masculinity promotes butch desire. Shaw disrupts the prevalent dichotomy of women's bodies (the phallus) by selling the car vs. men who want the car and *have* the phallus (ibid). Her female body appropriates the phallus through the car and becomes the subject of desire, not the object.

In many scenes, Shaw boasts her virile physicality around the car on stage. She slides across the hood and hangs on the window and roof. Sometimes, she plays air-guitar and air-keyboard with the open door and rocks like Chuck Berry or Elvis Presley. She lies down on her back inside the car, sticks her head out of the driver's side window, and stretches her legs out of the other side window. Maintaining this horizontal posture, she grabs the roof of the car through the open driver's side window. At the melancholic moments when she meditates on her aging, she sits inside the car and makes cool guy-like gestures, resting her arm around the open window. Further, Shaw lies on her stomach on the hood and imitates penetration with pelvic movements, holding the roof and singing Chuck Berry's *Mabelline* in tandem with Stoll's fast drum beats.<sup>48</sup> For Shaw, the car is a treasury of butch fantasy that heals, transforms, and defeats the enemy (aging in *TMC*) (ibid). And it is an emotional vehicle where her feelings travel.

Significantly, Shaw's autoeroticism functions as a booster to fight her aging. She stands beside the car and recites all the brands, production years, and colors of cars that she has owned, along with rhythmic jazz music and Stoll's drumming. Shaw says

---

<sup>48</sup> Chuck Berry's *Mabelline* is the song that a guy in his V-8 Ford pursues a woman in a Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Shaw enacts the black male rock'n roller's song as a white butch lesbian's automophilia anthem that celebrates her transgressive sexuality.

behind the cab,

Passion-less is a word I would use to describe my state of mind:

Undriven, like my old cars sitting in the backyard. Unmotivated.

Like a bad exhaust system. [. . .]

Can't seem to get excited about much of anything. Only the  
memory of what cars mean.

But standing on the roof, she declares that she is not afraid to die or of being alone when she sits in the driver's seat. She conceives all the pieces and parts of the car as a reliable safety device or defense system for her emotional vulnerability. Thus, whenever she talks about her car, she takes a confident and proud manner, stretching her shoulders and keeping her chin up. Meanwhile, the way she feels about her cars becomes the main component of passing on her masculinity to Ian. Her identification with an old car motivates teaching Ian about the car and how to drive.

However, she is mindful of warning-lessons for her "premature grand baby lilac son" in addition to the thrill and freedom of driving. Shaw brings up a "cold and freezing-to-death story" on driveways in teaching him to drive. She jumps down from the roof, stands on the hood toward the windshield in a blackout and lights the windshield with a flashlight, looking down at the driver's seat.

Stop! Be still. Be silent [. . .]

Keep your hands in sight. No hands in pocket [. . .] No hands in motion.

Do not move. [. . .] You could die if you move.

Don't reach for anything you could be killed for.

Get out of the car and keep your hands up.

Spread your legs. You have the right to remain silent.

Silent, frozen and cold.

She warns Ian that driving on a highway can be always interrupted by the police. Her performance of a typical officer's statement reminds me of racial profiling and police brutality. If she has been harassed by police due to her deviant gender display, Ian is susceptible to ill treatment by the police due to his skin color.<sup>49</sup> Through the racial and gender policing on the road, Shaw cautions Ian that queer genders and people of color are easily suspected and endangered.

Finally, Shaw's driving lesson for Ian evolves to her learning or revelation of her own whiteness. She pulls a hanging lamp on the ceiling and puts it over the torn bumper of the car so that it gives light under the car in the dark. Then, she takes out a dolly underneath the bed. Lying down on the dolly, she rolls her upper body under the truck and stretches her legs toward the audience. She begins her "inbred/white bread" soliloquy, "I'm pale I'm all white next to you. I'm an inbred white bread. Except for my brown left arm hanging out the car window." In white dominant discourses, when race is frequently regarded as "Other" or "Black," whiteness remains un-raced and transparent because white privilege sanctions "the ability to not-see whiteness and its privilege" (Mahoney 331). On the contrary, Shaw actively makes her whiteness visible and perceptible. While she unveils her hidden whiteness, the lamp shines on her body under the car. The butch, white grandma, who learned racist images including Little Black Sambo, derogates whiteness by calling herself an "inbred white bread." The

---

<sup>49</sup> In her e-mail correspondence with me on May 24, 2007, Dolan suggested that this scene might reflect on Shaw's own experience of being a gender outlaw-female driver.

privileged normative status of whiteness is evacuated as tasteless and plain (white bread) in conjunction with the connotation of her working-classness (inbred). Her brown left arm marks her working-class masculinity and ruptures pure “whiteness.” She adds,

White people like me are all inbred

All white people in America are descended from criminals

And religious fanatics.

That’s who came to the original immigration.

Mentioning the immigration history of white America, Shaw underscores the fact that America was not the whites’ land. Further, she returns negative images of non-whites to whiteness and defaces white superiority. Whereas many racist stereotypes totalize black people as a homogenous group, ignoring individual differences, Shaw stereotypes white people as a group. This undermines the given power relation that “whites are free to see themselves as ‘individuals’” (ibid). In the words of Martha R. Mahoney, whites’ recourse to individualism stems from their resistance to perceiving whiteness and to “being placed in the category ‘white’ at all” (ibid). To tackle the hegemonic invisibility of the white race, Shaw forsakes white individualism.

She continues to tell Ian his pedigree:

My ex husband, your grand slam father

Is proven by Hitlerguy [sic]

To come from

10 generations of pure white ger-man

Your white mother, my daughter

Put an end to that his [sic] story

She is the daughter of a couple mixed

Queer mother me and heterosexual dad father him

Shaw's and Ian's family line is sexually (hetero- and homo-), racially (white and black), and ethnically (German, Irish, and Jamaican) mixed. It has proceeded to put an end a pure white hetero blood. Besides, she reveals that she is "a mixed up second generation, first cousin combo." Finally, the inbred, Irish, grand-butche-mother appreciates Ian as her "dual-heritage, bi-racial, mixed metaphor, Well bred, bye-bye, sweet island boy."

Owing to well-bred Ian, the Caribbean Sea (Jamaica) now flows in Shaw's heart, and a black heritage breathes. After Shaw comes out from under the car, sliding on the dolly, she stands beside the car facing the audience and unbuttons her shirt. As she exposes her breasts in the dark, a video of Ian dancing is projected onto her bare chest. While projecting the video with background music, Stoll's drumming and the recorded sounds of a car horn are imbricated with the image. In doing so, Shaw reconfirms her bonds with Ian through enthusiasm about cars. It seems to me that the unbuttoning of her "white" shirt and the exposing of her naked breasts symbolize uncloaking her whiteness. Shaw's butch breasts fed Ian's mother, and as she embraces him figuratively in her arms, her chest becomes a dance floor where Ian has fun. Ian's blackness is unified with Shaw's aging Irish working-class butch body. Also, Shaw's "white" shirt and "black" pants resonate with the racially mixed image of Ian onto her white chest. In this image, blackness and whiteness are not separable from each other, and hence, Shaw cannot otherize blackness.

This striking scene also illuminates how butch motherhood queerly redefines gender. For many butches, breasts are discomfiting parts of the body that disagrees

with and impairs their masculinity.<sup>50</sup> Shaw bound her breasts in *You're Just Like My Father*, making a connection “between binding her breasts and wrapping her hands in boxing wraps,” as if she needs to protect herself before battle (Bergman 42). In contrast, as an inbred white bread butch grandma, she exhibits her bare breasts in order to hold her mixed race grandson and to critically ponder her own whiteness. Considering that this video projection scene corresponds to the ritual of burying her naked white female body in the ground, it seems that Shaw’s queer grandmotherhood or “paternal” care enabled her to reconfigure her femaleness. She comments in an interview, “My portrayal of the butch lesbian has changed. [. . .] I feel like I have come into a comfortable place with my body. [. . .] My butchness has mellowed a bit. There is a different kind of understanding of the world at my age” (Perille). Clearly, her changed presentation of her breasts is also related to her aging.

However, it is necessary to note that her breasts are not displayed as a sexualized part of a woman’s body, and are more linked to her grand “fathering.” Rather, it seems to me that Shaw’s sexiness is found in her butch masculinity or in the tension between her breasts and her tuxedo jacket and in her queer courage to expose her breasts as a genderfucking practice. Bergman’s musing on butch breasts echoes the ambiguous and multifaceted meanings contained in Shaw’s breasts:

There is no final statement to make on the subject of breasts, no conclusion to draw, no way to say anything for sure except that when it comes to breasts, nothing is simple [. . .] [g]ender and truth and trust and

---

<sup>50</sup> Bergman notes that many butches share the idea of breasts that are “lovely for you, not acceptable for me” (39).

skin complicate one another in a thousand directions, beautiful and grotesque, comforting and dangerous, charmed and strange. Then again, the same could be said of butches. (44)

Shaw's video projection onto her naked breasts entangles and destabilizes the uniform relations of sex, gender, sexuality, and motherhood/fatherhood, creating touching moments of multiple butch beauty.

As such, Shaw's butch grandmotherhood even challenges lesbian gender. The cultural message that mothers are passive whereas butches are dominant and assertive might be widely held within lesbian communities (Loulan 1995: 249). Due to the predominant notions that mothering attributes are linked to femininity, motherhood is seemingly incompatible with butchness. Yet with gender-inconsistent behaviors, butch mothers "disrupt notions of coherent butch identity" and challenge the polarities/dichotomies of "the masculine/feminine, passive/active, and mother/father" (Epstein 47 and Loulan 1995: 253). By teaching driving and through her knowledge about cars, Shaw plays a conventional grandfather's role to Ian as a butch grandmother. Accounting for butch motherhood, Rachel Epstein articulates how it reinvents butch identities and widens butch experiences:

[A]cknowledgement of one's disowned parts, while possibly experienced as cross-gendered behavior or feelings, does not change gender identity. Rather it expands the affective and behavioral dimensions one might allow oneself to experience as part of a felt sense of gender. Motherhood for a butch, then, might expand what it means to be butch, without emptying butch of its meaning as an identification. [. . .] [b]utch identity is not

antithetical to the giving required of mothers. (48)

Certainly, it is true that queer grandmotherhood encourages Shaw to allow for emotional vulnerability and to reconstitute her butchness.

After she buttons her shirt in the blackout, Shaw returns to down stage left to end her story of being in the ground.<sup>51</sup> Under the spotlight, she faces toward the audience, bending her arms and showing her palms, and describes how she felt like a new-born babe when people dug her out. She says that they said, “It’s a butch!! [. . .] It’s [. . .] a big butch girl. [. . .] The tree died and you lived! [. . .] The tree sacrificed itself for you!” Shaw depicts the moments when she came out of the ground like a childbirth scene.<sup>52</sup> Through the pseudo death ritual of being buried alive except for her head, Shaw lets the dirt absorb her “whiteness” in the ground until the earth warms and rejuvenates her aging body. And she is born new as a healthy butch babe, who grows into a self-reflective white butch grandma while the little boy-midwife Ian is watching and helping her birth.

Explaining her last monologue in *TMC*, Shaw remarks in an interview, “I’m taking my whiteness and turning it into a lullaby to Ian” (Cragin). She approaches the car, opens the door of the driver’s seat. While she rolls up the window and closes the door, she starts saying,

I’m blinded by morning

I’m blinded white

---

<sup>51</sup> This spot is the same place where she talks about her ritual of being in the ground throughout the performance.

<sup>52</sup> Shaw writes on the moment, “I was crying and sobbing and covered with wet earth and blood dripping down my legs” (2003 “Gosh Dirt”: 240), which also suggests a childbirth-like scene.

So much white in my head

It's bright, it's white

You're kinda bright dark

Dark

Blinded by shadows

Your shadows are so bright

Blinded by night<sup>53</sup>

Through the contrast between morning and night and between white and dark, Shaw underlines the differently racialized reality in which she and Ian are positioned.

However, she confesses that she is blinded by whiteness in her head. Using the seemingly oxymoronic “bright dark” and “bright shadows,” she empties the negative implications of blackness.

As an instrumental music version of James Brown’s “I Feel Good” plays, Shaw starts walking around the car and speaking the lyrics of the song like a lullaby. Unlike the original version of Brown’s song, Stoll’s rearranged music is very slow and mellow, and sounds like a Bach song (Cragin).

I feel good.

Like I knew that I would.

I feel good

So good

So good.

---

<sup>53</sup> No punctuation in the script. Shaw does not keep her punctuation consistent.

‘Cause I got you

While Shaw recites the lyrics, she polishes the car with the end of her jacket sleeve, adjusts the wiper, and strokes the body, as if the car is Ian, and she lulls him to sleep. Her face is glowing with much love, affection, and happiness. As she removes the flashlight on the hood and the lamp over the bumper, she continues, “I feel nice. So nice. So nice. ‘Cause I got you.” Shaw stands in front of the car headlights, slightly spreading her legs and adjusts her pants and jacket. And she puts her hands in the pockets of her pants and closes the song, gazing into the distance. At the time, the car headlights turn on, and she says,

When I hold you in my arms

I know that I can do no wrong [. . .]

My love won’t do you no harm [. . .]

I feel good [. . .]

‘Cause I got you

While the car headlights keep shining on her from behind, the music fades into a blackout, and sounds of a speeding car overlap with the ending music.

Shaw’s untrained singing sounds like crooning, but creates moving Brechtian moments. Her singing style is related to the fact that theatre is a vehicle to fulfill her fantasies. Explaining her working process, she talks about her singing and fantasy, “When we’re making a show, [. . .] And we think, what’s our fantasy? ‘OK, this time, this show, I want to be a girl, and I wanna be bad, and I wanna sing the blues’” (2006: 28). Speaking about *TMC* in another interview, Shaw also mentions, “It’s a rock and roll poem. I got to have my fantasy of what I think a blues singer is, in a way, even

though I don't know how to sing" (Thomas). Though Shaw is not, in fact, a good singer, her affection for her grandson coupled with her fantasy to become a singer render her performance of a lullaby heart-warming.

Shaw began her performance by addressing racist prejudices and misinformation of black musicians and closes her show with Brown's "I Feel Good." By picking Brown's song as a lullaby for Ian, she pays homage to cultural and emotional influences from black male music and solidifies her bond with her "darka [sic] mixed up" grandson. It is worth remarking that the car headlights are on during her last monologue because it signifies that she readily keeps scrutinizing her whiteness. When she was in the ground, the car headlights were shining on her to illuminate her naked whiteness—that is, a naked exposure of who she was (2003 "Gosh Dirt": 242). Shaw's true love for Ian requires constant interrogation of her own whiteness and dis-assimilation into whiteness. She is clearly aware that to teach Ian how to drive in the harsh reality of white dominant America is inseparable from her own learning about white privilege and internalized racism.

John W. Thomas summarizes Shaw's solo butch trilogy in his review "Passing on Her Butchness," saying that *You're Just Like My Father* is about "her mother raising her," *Menopausal Gentleman (MG)* is about "who she became," and *To My Chagrin* is about "passing on her knowledge." Although she seems to focus on her personal experiences like menopause and family relationships, Shaw's autobiographical performance deals with aging butchness, butch feelings, and lesbian grandmotherhood; these topics are not usually addressed in lesbian/feminist performance. Her

autobiographical material “transforms a generic selfish worldview into something bigger” (Thomas).

Indeed, Shaw’s performance reaches social criticism beyond egocentric absorption through her self-reflection on the personal. She asserts, “Everything I do is political because of who I am. The nature of my gender and being makes anything I do political” (Perille). Being/doing an old white Irish working-class butch grandma enables her to intervene in social contradictions of sex, gender, class, race, and sexuality. By capitalizing on the incongruence between femaleness and masculinity, she explores uncharted territories of butchness and revises the established categories of femininity and masculinity. Importantly, Shaw manifests that displaying feelings from her tender heart is not antithetical to hard butch self-sufficiency and independence. Furthermore, by foregrounding the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, Shaw brilliantly materializes gender performativity and constructed masculinity on stage. Her gender-bending performance culminates in *TMC* by extending her critical lens to whiteness and racism.

Shaw uses the stage to express and relieve her frustration, searching for butch imagery to figure out her aging. As she was introduced to the theatre world by a black drag queen in *Hot Peaches*, and she named Ian after a drag queen who raised her daughter with her, queer theatre has been closely tied to her life experiences. Shaw has undergone emotional turmoil throughout her aging. She writes, “I think maybe I feel like a dog that’s been hit by an old car. I run into a bush and hide and lick my wounds. I’m licking my wounds and at the same time happy to be in the bushes” (2003 “Gosh Dirt”: 235). However, like a growling tiger in *MG* and the hole in the ground and car

engine in *TMC*, for Shaw, theatre has been a power motor that galvanizes queer energy and enlivens her aging body. It offers her a safe and creative shelter to heal and stage her wounds.

The old butch lesbian, who resembles Sean Penn and looks like Richard Gere (because of her gray hair), is young enough not to be weary of exploring unknown layers. The menopausal gentleman who sings like Frank Sinatra and the butch grandma who rocks like Chuck Berry translates her queer interpretation of femaleness into theatre. Shaw's changes in configuring femaleness have traveled from a sweaty tiger in her own "private summer" to a naked female body that exposes her whiteness to hold Ian. Whereas she was alienated from her erratic menopausal body in *MG*, she embraces her femaleness more comfortably in *TMC*. Shaw's work demonstrates that the butch constantly reconstructs and renegotiates their femaleness. Simultaneously, she is "reifying and disavowing maleness" in the paradoxical "travesty, the riddle which is so erotically charged" (Munt 1998: 60). The queer riddle will keep captivating the audience, and Shaw's autobiographical theatre archive will not cease to innovatively engage with social issues.

## Chapter 2: Queering Asian Female Masculinities

Writing is a ritual. [. . .] I write to dispel stereotypes, to give my characters voice, breath, life. I write to fill the void, to reclaim my heritage, to affirm my history, to celebrate truth, to define existence as a woman of color and as a lesbian. I write because my anger and my pain are too explosive to keep inside.

—Kitty Tsui (64)

I was inspired to write this chapter for three main reasons. One is that in the five years I have been in the United States, I have developed a critical consciousness of racist stereotypes of Asians and have come to understand the Orientalist emasculation of Asian (male and female) masculinity. Another is that I call into question the presumed homogeneity of Asia/Asianness as espoused by U.S. society where whiteness is supreme. Lastly, I am deeply troubled with the serious dearth of performance work by queer Asian female performance artists and the invisibility of the queer Asian female subject. In this chapter, I aim to explore how kt shorb and D’Lo disrupt stereotypes of Asians and represent “the complicated interplay and collision of different identities within the interior of the category ‘Asian American’” in their performance of masculinity (Takagi 14). Through my close reading of shorb’s *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* and D’Lo’s *Ramble-Ations*, I attempt to illuminate the constructedness of racialized masculinity and to de-centralize the homogenized category of Asian/Asian Americanness.

As a South Korean native, I did not become aware of my body as “Asian” body until I left my own cultural/social/political context; I did not previously know how the Asian body is read and marked by eyes of white racism and Western centrism. I was, prior to coming to the U.S., aware of my body as a genderqueer body within the Korean

context: I am hyper-visible in the Korean streets for my ambiguous gender display. I am always conscious of people constantly inspecting and staring at me. However, in the U.S., nobody stares at me and or finds my gender expression ambiguous, aggressive, and threatening – all values which are projected onto me in Korea.<sup>54</sup> When I first arrived, this shift in experience allowed me to feel good and free until I figured out why I am not perceived as ambiguous or threatening. This became painfully apparent to me during the course of my studies. One day in a class in my program, a white male classmate stated, “You’re invisible to me because you’re silent.” At the time, I was shocked not only by the fact that my quiet presence could render me ignorable, but also by the racist implications of his statement. Regardless of my individual disposition and personality, I have been assumed to be a shy, compliant Asian “woman.” Because of this experience, I realized how my gender is feminized due to my race. To some Americans, my gender does not matter, and I am made “invisible” because of my Asian body. In other words, my race already overdetermines my body. As another anecdote, I was invited to my white butch friend’s party and met with a stranger, an East-European white lesbian. She approached me and said, “I thought you are a man when you appeared, first. You know, Asian men are small. The young Asian man looks like a boy. But as soon as I saw your tiny wrist and small nose, I noticed that you’re a woman.” Not being offended by that, I responded to her, “I can’t believe this! You said that my nose is small? You know what? My nose is big enough in Korea. My friends used to make fun of me because my nose is unusually big and high as a Korean woman. And you castrated my

---

<sup>54</sup> Sometimes, I am mistaken as a man and called “sir” in the U.S. But even in that case, I am read as an effeminate “Asian” man.

dick. In Korea, a man's nose symbolizes the size of his dick.” Around us, many friends laughed, watching our conversation. I found it very interesting that her remark (hilariously) illustrates how cultural codes used to interpret gendered bodies vary in societies, and how racial stereotypes are involved in our perceptions of masculinity.

Along with the emasculation of Asian men, Orientalist racism was a new experience for me. It did not take a long time to find out how feminization of the Asian body is linked to Orientalism. When I was preparing for my qualifying exam, I got support-gifts from a nice white male Ph.D. student who was not close to me. I opened his package with appreciation. But upon seeing what was inside, I was totally speechless. Inside were a pencil with a “monkey” decoration, a pencil with a “monk,” a pair of Japanese chopstick, packaged grilled seaweed from Japan, and a bar of soap with the image of Ganesh – the Indian elephant god. I cannot thank him enough for his generosity and delicateness. However, his “pan-Asian package,” painfully alerted me to what Asianness signifies and to how it is totalized in America, and the overlaps of this with Orientalism. The incident showed me the racist homogenization of Asia, which “implies Asians are ‘all like’ and conform to ‘type’” (Lowe 2000: 431). Many non-Asian Americans assume that Asians share all the diverse Asian cultures with each other. Chinese-American writer Helen Zia indicates the conflation and homogenization of Asians:

For most Americans are quite ignorant of, or unconcerned by, the distinctions between different Asian countries, peoples, and cultures. Characters in mass media often blend the widely diverse traits from distinct Asian cultures into an unimaginative, one-size-fits-all Asian

stereotype. Disney's high budget and carefully researched *Mulan* features Chinese soldiers dressed in Japanese samurai outfits. (117)

In the American imagination, my Koreanness can be easily equated at any time with any other Asian culture: from a Buddhist (monk pencil) to Japanese (chopsticks) to Indian Ganesh. Though all these experiences might be perceived as arising from individuals whose limitations must be considered, I do believe that they serve as examples of the larger phenomena of white racism and Orientalism that permeate U.S. society.

In particular, masculine queer Asian American women have to deal with gendered racial stereotypes of Asian women and men as well as general racism toward Asians. Orientalist discourses in the U.S. portray Asian women as "hyperfeminine, exotic, and passive objects of white heterosexual male desire" (Lee 117). The two typical stereotypes of the "Lotus Blossom Baby" (submissive sexual objects) and the "Dragon Lady" (scheming femme fatales) have perpetuated the dominant images of Asian women. Therefore, in the confluence of racial and gender contradictions of the queer Asian body, as David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom write, whereas the Asian American male sissy is hypervisible, the Asian American lesbian remains invisible (12). In this discussion, I will illustrate that Asian American women's queer genders are not only examples of gender transgressions but also serve as resistance to racism.<sup>55</sup>

The invisibility of queer Asian-American female masculinity will also be explicated in light of the pressure from the male dominant, heteronormative Asian diasporic communities in the U.S., with full consideration given for nationalist notions of

---

<sup>55</sup> Chinese American butch lesbian writer Kitty Tsui says, "Bodybuilding empowers me to reject both the stereotype of the passive Madame Butterfly and the fiery Suzy Wong/Dragon Lady images" (68).

“homeland.” As Gayatri Gopinath points out in *Impossible Desires*, “[Q]ueer female diasporic subjectivity remains unimaginable and unthinkable not only within dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses but also within some gay male, as well as liberal feminist, rearticulations of diaspora” (19). Hetero-patriarchal perceptions of diaspora and homeland are “inattentive to gender” or “silent on sexuality” (Puar 407), which excludes and elides queer female subjects. The unimaginability and unthinkability of queer Asian female subjectivity is related to the naïve and static understanding of Asianness. If constructions of Asianness do not embrace and explore class, gender, ethnic, and sexual differences within Asia and Asian diasporic communities, the racist homogenization of Asianness is replicated in other exclusive and discriminatory forms within Asian communities.

Queer Asian female masculinity is a pivotal locus to address gender, ethnic, and sexual differences and to discuss diverse diasporic experiences in opposition to the simplification of a pan-Asian identity. Lisa Lowe offers a valuable insight into debates on Asian-Americanness,

[T]he Asian-origin collectivity is unstable and changeable. [. . .] The boundaries and definitions of Asian American cultures are continually shifting and being contested. [. . .] Thus, heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity are concepts that assist us in critically understanding the material conditions of Asians in the United States. (2000: 428-429)

shorb’s and D’Lo’s work crystallizes the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of Asianness and demonstrates how their ethnic and cultural differences are reflected in the constitution and embodiment of their own masculinity.

Austin-based queer Asian-American performance artist shorb's *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* sparked my critical ideas of emasculated Asian masculinity. I was struck by hir work because s/he probes into racial stereotypes of Asians that undergird the feminization of Asian men, stereotypes which s/he subverts by presenting assertive, aggressive, and competent Asian male characters.<sup>56</sup> shorb's monologues resonate with my own experiences of emasculation and racism that I have described above. Inspired by hir performance, I have been exposed to a wide range of theoretical works and useful resources that concern Orientalism, Asian American history and politics, and Asian queer studies.<sup>57</sup> In doing so, I could sharpen my critical thoughts on Asian masculinity and racist emasculation.

Sri Lankan-American D'Lo's *Ramble-Ations* helped me fundamentally problematize the homogeneity of Asianness and marginality of South Asians within Asian-American discourses and communities. Owing to her work, I have come to realize that how predominant "East" Asian voices and issues are in Asian-American activism and academy. Besides, I learned that South Asianness is often reducible to Indianness, which made me be vigilantly attentive to social contradictions associated with the layers of invisibility within Asianness. When I saw her performance and talked with her, I was surprised that she and I have little commonality as "Asians." Hence, I was convinced that it is imperative to explore differences between East and South Asians. I

---

<sup>56</sup> shorb identifies as a tranny (transgender) boy. I use "s/he" or "hir" throughout this dissertation to indicate shorb, considering that s/he performs both male and female characters in *of chicks, dicks, and chinks*.

<sup>57</sup> In Edward Said's groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, he argues that Orientalism has constructed and operated as an imperialist, colonial discourse predicated on the essentialized antithesis between the West and the non-West (the Arab and middle-Eastern worlds). His discussion of Orientalism has been a key text of Asian-American/postcolonial studies to critique Eurocentrism.

was especially intrigued by her performing black masculinity in conjunction with hip-hop aesthetics and Hindu spirituality. This unusual juxtaposition has prompted me to pay closer attention to racial passing and performativity in performance.

In the rest of the chapter, through my performance analysis of *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* and *Ramble-Ations*, I will examine how shorb and D’Lo represent Asian male characters, as well as their own masculinities, and I will investigate how they deal with divergent stakes and agendas in staging Asian female masculinities. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will argue that both shorb and D’Lo challenge the impossibility of Asian female queer genders and illuminate the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of Asian-Americanness.

### **kt shorb’s of chicks, dicks, and chinks**

In *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* (cdc, 2005), shorb addresses the theme of emasculated Asian masculinity by performing various Asian male characters.<sup>58</sup> shorb is a Japanese American composer, performer, writer, and activist who identifies as transgender.<sup>59</sup> In reading David Henry Hwang’s play, *M. Butterfly*, in terms of the antithesis of “the Oriental” and “manhood,” David Eng suggests that Asian American males have been “feminized, emasculated, or homosexualized” in the U.S. cultural imagery (1, 16). Similarly, Thomas Nakayama argues that “any lack of a white phallus already marks one as marginal” because the phallus is configured as a white one in a

---

<sup>58</sup> I am very grateful to shorb for giving me an unpublished script, a performance DVD of *cdc*, and hir Masters Report in the department of Radio-Television-Film at UT Austin.

<sup>59</sup> shorb is a mixed blood person between hir Japanese mother and white father.

white society (167). Applying these ideas to shorb's struggle, s/he wrestles with hir doubly negated phallus in that s/he does not have a penis (with the female body) and s/he has an Asian body.

shorb challenges the assumed effeminacy of Asian men in general and the invisibility and emasculation of masculine Asian females within white dominant lesbian/queer communities in particular. Although s/he mainly deals with the emasculation of Asian men and performs male characters, hir female body is quite visible throughout the performance. In hir Masters Report, shorb articulates hir concerns and efforts with respect to performing masculinity with an Asian American female body:

The pervasiveness of phallic "lack" in performances of masculinity by both female bodies as well as Asian bodies [. . .] lead to differing strategies of resistance. [. . .] [h]ow would Asian American masculine females address ideas of Orientalism and racial castration while simultaneously combating essentialist notions of what it means to be "Asian American" or "female" or "masculine?" While it might be a common trap for them/us to bear the burden of representation, Asian American masculine females also have other queer and/or Asian American texts with which to respond and converse. (xix, xxxvii)

Hir performance itself tests and exemplifies difficulties and risks to convincingly perform masculinity with an Asian American female body.

shorb's bi-racial identity and trans(gender)-identification usefully complicate matters. Hir mixed race and queer gender simultaneously foreground "belonging to nowhere" (as a productive "homelessness") and "blending in-between." Hir Japanese-

white Americanness and female masculinity evoke a blurred line between Asianness (East) and Americanness (West), and between man and woman. shorb's hybrid, multiple identities juxtapose "Asian diaspora" with "gender dysphoria" and bring up numerous issues concerning race, ethnicity, class, and gender that are embedded in hir Asian American body. Despite hir semi-autobiographical input in *cdc*, as s/he focuses on assertive and confrontational Asian male characters, shorb's trans identity is not placed at center. However, performing diverse male characters "under hir skin" with the female body resonates with hir multiple identities and highlights the performative nature of masculinity.<sup>60</sup> Due to shorb's trans-identification, the relationships of "the performer" as hirself and hir "male characters" are rendered more intimate and ambiguous, unlike general male impersonation. Although shorb takes a form of male impersonation, strictly speaking, we cannot say that s/he performs hir "opposite" sex in "cross"-dressing. In addition, since experiences and concerns of the male characters are related to hir own existence and reality in configuring Asian trans masculinity, shorb's male impersonation can be seen as an extension and exploration of hir transgender identity.

shorb's *cdc* stages a theatrical interpretation of critical racial theories by David Eng, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Fung. Hir heavy dependence on these theories by male scholars of color reveals the dearth/or absence of an established theory of Asian "female" masculinity; it is obviously because an effeminized Asian American (male) masculinity

---

<sup>60</sup> In the monologue of hir autobiographical character Dean, shorb borrows the phrase "under my skin" from the song "I've Got You Under My Skin" in order to suggest that all the male characters are reflected in the constitution of hir own masculinity. I will deal with this in more detail later in this chapter.

affects the ways in which the Asian American lesbian (masculine) gender are perceived and constructed in white America (Eng and Hom 1). shorb's complicated subject position creates tension and irony throughout the performance because s/he cannot free himself from stereotypes of Asian "male" masculinity. Yet hir "female" body raises different conundrums from those of the Asian male body performing masculinity.

*cdc* begins with a video presentation on a big, white, wooden-framed screen on a platform upstage, with the text that reads "task/in-progress." This device visually frames hir following performance.<sup>61</sup> The audience faces the stage, seated in rows. The two attached stairs connect the platform upstage to the flat, main stage. In the video projection of "task/in-progress," shorb wears white boxer shorts and an undershirt, and keeps moving rice grains and bricks from hir left to hir right along with the repetitive voice-over "go, stop." Hir white boxers and undershirt imply that various identities will be "worn" and written on hir body.<sup>62</sup> Piling rice grains and stacking bricks suggest a constant labor (task) to formulate identity and spotlights the (re)constructed nature of identity. In the video "task/in-progress," the recorded text "go, stop, no, now" loops in the scene where s/he quickly enters and comes out of women's and men's restrooms, which hints at the bathroom problem of the genderqueer. Here, the obsessive words of "go, stop" sound like a social imperative of gender control through the normative gender binary. Besides, the video rapidly and vaguely shows several images of the abjection of

---

<sup>61</sup> I analyze shorb's performance at the Tillery theatre of ALLGO (The Austin Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization) on Apr 17, 2005. Hir performance was directed by Madge Darlington.

<sup>62</sup> During the performance, shorb often changes clothing on stage, exposing the white boxers and undershirt whenever s/he alternates characters.

Asians, Asian stereotypes, and gay sex scenes over hir image of piling rice and bricks. These collisions and transparent layering of all different sounds and diverse visual images are emblematic of the complicated nature of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and their intersections.

The character Shité's monologue functions as the prologue of *cdc* and sets shorb's queer performance within the context of hir Japanese family line. After the video projection, shorb appears on the platform stage as Shité (a former Noh player as hir grandfather).<sup>63</sup> As shorb did in the video "task/in-progress," Shité also moves rice grains on stage. He wears traditional Japanese festival clothing (*happi*) and slippers (*zouri*) and holds a fan. shorb's white undershirt is exposed through the open jacket. With the Japanese outfit, gestures, movements, and traditional Japanese music, shorb's Asian American body looks more Japanese. During this monologue, shorb as Shité walks with short and quick steps, slightly bending hir back. However, because of hir high voice and young-looking face, shorb does not (or cannot) convincingly perform an old Japanese man. In other words, in hir male impersonation, shorb's femaleness is present, and the audience is aware that s/he is a female impersonating a male. After his welcoming greeting, Shité comes down to the main stage. As Shité sees an on-screen image of a goddess spirit (which signifies his playing of a goddess spirit in Noh theatre), he delivers his own notion of performing femininity with a male body. He declares, "playing the gentle, delicate, expressions of a woman proved my nobility, my intelligence, my manhood" (*cdc cxv*). His statement deconstructs stereotypical

---

<sup>63</sup> shorb's grandfather was a Noh player during the 1930s ("Masters Report" lxxiv)

representations and notions of effeminate Asian masculinity in the West. In spite of his performed femininity in Noh, he stresses that he was a highly educated, powerful man and a rich Japanese imperial capitalist. These facts contradict racial prejudices of Asian men as subservient and powerless associated with the emasculation of Asian men. Finally, Shité gives the audience another interpretation of his granddaughter's exploration of masculinity with her female body by saying, "She can embody anything she wants: beast, god, woman, man or all of the above." He links the theatricality and possibility of performance to anti-essentialist understanding of identities. In doing so, he validates and encourages shorb's queer performance as transformative self-expressions or practices of gender mutability.

With this introduction, shorb situates hir "own version of manhood" through the analogy between (Japanese) female impersonation in Noh theatre and hir male impersonation in terms of performing gender on stage. But shorb makes it clear that there exists a big gap between the imperial capitalist Japanese man (Shité) and hir. Shité's playing a female role is neither queer gender bending nor a reification of effeminate Asian masculinity but an extension of his power to perform and appropriate the other. Shité's privilege as an upper-class man/imperialist patriarch is quite distant from the material conditions that a FTM (female to male transgender) Asian American faces in white America.

Shité engages with a racial stereotype of the Japanese through dominant representations of the samurai in America, emphasizing the nobility of the samurai and his own upper-classness. He says that his father was one of the last samurai, and he was last in a long line of "nobility." He humorously adds a sarcastic comment, "Tom

Cruise. [. . .] No. A real samurai, who took care of people and protected the peasants” (*cdc cxvi*). This statement informs of his class status on the one hand and critiques Hollywood’s appropriation of Japanese culture on the other. In mainstream American media, Asian men have been represented as Kung Fu masters or Yakuza (criminal gangsters). Further, Nakayama indicates that Hollywood’s martial arts genre features white male leads as Asian skill experts who control unruly Asians and restore justice and order (169). Asian martial arts connote savage otherness and potential criminality when the Asian body performs them. On the contrary, when the white American body enacts Asian martial arts, white expertise of Asian martial arts is read as a new brand of heroism with an exotic flavor. shorb brings to light the Western distortion and exploitation of Japanese culture, accentuating the contrary Shité’s class position. For Shité, the savage cruelty of Japanese samurais in Western eyes means “nobility” to him. shorb interrupts the racist stereotyping of the Japanese through Shité’s comment on samurais. And yet, simultaneously, hir femaleness serves to defamiliarize hir personal past and Japanese lineage so that s/he can underline Shité’s contradictions, instead of idealizing him.

shorb describes that s/he was concerned if the Shité monologue idolizes and commemorates him too much against hir intention, and that s/he had discomfort with the romanticization of Shité’s hegemonic paternalism (“Masters Report” lxxxv). In this context, it was a wise choice that shorb cast him as a “ghost,” and in the actual performance, it was apparent that s/he calls attention to Shité’s potency and privilege. Shité is a part of hir Asian genealogy, but he is already dead and of the past. The past still influences the present in a way, but shorb is able to “summon” and see hir grandfather with a critical distance.

shorb moves to portray a frustrated and angry Asian boy character in order to address racial harassment against Asians interconnected to the emasculation of Asian men. As Shité's monologues ends, the screen on stage displays a montage of images of a young Asian hip-hop boy (Norman). The boy makes hip-hop gestures, and the slides stop when he takes a Kung-Fu stance and gazes front. Then, shorb as Norman brings a chair and sits down on the backwards facing chair in the center stage. He wears a hoodie with a picture of Bruce Lee, baggy hip-hop blue jeans, and a backwards ball cap. From the traditional Japanese music and costume to the hip-hop music and fashion, shorb takes off Shité's traditional Japanese body and embodies urban hip-hop culture. Norman keeps saying, "yo, shit, and fuck!" using black accents and hip-hop rhythms. His way of speaking and moving marks Asians' appropriation of blackness through hip-hop. Norman seems to believe that using hip-hop gestures and black vernacular empowers him and makes him look more aggressive and masculine. As an angry, aggressive young Asian American, Norman talks about his frustration with racism and his aspiration to be a man in order to prove "yellow powa [power]." shorb writes that "Norman is derived from a pun on 'neither woman nor man' ("Masters Report" lxxvi). "Neither woman nor man" status poignantly echoes Norman's effeminate Asian masculinity and shorb's trans identity simultaneously.

Norman's monologue revolves around a conflict with racist white boys. While he drives, white boys tell Norman and his friends, "hey, pussy boys, don'tchya go back to where you come from," making slanted eyes in order to mock Asians. This slur displays persistent stereotypes of Asians that "Asians cannot be and are not American" (Nakayama 168). Telling the audience the story, Norman defies the racist emasculation

and insult by impersonating the racist white boys as sissy boys. Conversely, by feminizing the racist white boys, Norman strives to re-secure his deprived masculinity. He worships Kung Fu action-movie stars such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, and Hong Kong Noir film stars like Chow Yun Fat who are the opposite of (Asian) pussy boys.<sup>64</sup> He has a fetishistic fondness for his car as a way of confirming masculinity. Norman's fascination with martial arts and strong identification with heroic Asian men reflect his desire to counter the mainstream stereotypes of Asian men as "devoid of manhood" (Eng 209). He resorts to a dominant notion of masculinity, indignantly responding to the emasculation of Asian men.

Norman's subsequent anecdote of using a baseball bat in his confrontation with the white boys conveys his struggles for the recuperation of his Asian phallus. According to Norman, finally he could avoid a dangerous physical fight with the white boys by pulling a baseball bat to threaten "those (white) crackas." Here, the baseball bat is not just a protective weapon but an enlarged substitute for Norman's diminished masculinity. Analyzing the Hollywood film *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, Nakayama asserts that a white cop's "oversized" mega-shotgun is an emblem for his white phallus and encodes the feminization of his Asian assistant cop (170). When the white crackas drive off in Norman's story, they shout, "the gook's gotta bat!"<sup>65</sup> This very short sentence connotes a lot. Gook has come to be an invective about all Asians, a slang term which does not account for ethnic and national differences.<sup>66</sup> The white boys'

---

<sup>64</sup> Norman calls Lee, Chan, and Chow as gazillion Asian REAL Men (*cdc cxvi*).

<sup>65</sup> shorb as Norman plays this line of white boys like an effeminate, timid boy.

<sup>66</sup> Gook was used by U.S. troops in Korea and Vietnam as a slur for natives in South and East Asia in the 1950s and the 1960s (Roediger 117). Currently, in America, by extension, it means any Asian person.

discovery of Norman's baseball bat can be figuratively read as their unwilling, surprising acknowledgment that Asians have their own phallus. As Butler argues, in the nature of "the displaceability of the phallus," other body-like things can symbolize the phallus (1991: 84). Norman is a male with a penis, but his phallus and his masculinity is constantly castrated because of his race. There is no inherent chain of identity between the phallus and a penis. Maleness does not automatically bestow and ensure phallic power, and race always intervenes in signifying the phallus.

Norman's anger and frustrations about the emasculation of Asian men are culminated when he describes the 442<sup>nd</sup> infantry division during WW II. At that time, Nisei (Japanese heritage) soldiers' draft status was classified as 4-C, "Enemy Aliens," and Japanese Americans' loyalty to America was questioned. This Anti-Japanese racial discourse, "propaganda about the traitorous Asian as less than human" served to unify and fortify U.S. national identity (Lowe 2005: 49-50). Therefore, to prove their loyalty to America, Japanese American soldiers were forced (or volunteered) to "fill high-risk stations on the front lines and rescue other units deemed 'lost'" (shorb "Masters Report" lxxviii). This historical fact upsets the stereotype of Asians as effeminate wimps. Through Norman's reminder of the 442<sup>nd</sup> infantry division, shorb debunks the other side of the ideology to emasculate Asian men. Norman deplores, "Do we all gotta go fucking' Kamikaze to get some respect?" Asian men could restore their disavowed masculinity only when they dare to sacrifice their cheap bodies for the U.S. military hegemony.

Whereas shorb criticizes racial castration of Asian men through the character Norman, s/he draws attention to the limitations of a heterosexist Asian American

activism and studies through Norman's self-contradictions. Agreeing with Frank Chin, Norman complains, "It's like, all of us are mother fucking' homo faggots," and he is infuriated by a magazine headline, "Gay or Asian?"<sup>67</sup> While he accuses the American media of the conflation of gayness and Asianness, he also exhibits his own homophobia. Norman's homophobia reflects Asian American cultural nationalist projects that consolidate hetero-patriarchy in order to valorize Asian manhood. Many Asian American queer scholars and activists have challenged the essentialist, heterosexist project of earlier Asian cultural nationalism and have tried to integrate the interplay of race, gender, and (homo) sexuality in reconfiguring Asian Americanness. In "Maiden Voyage," Dana Y. Tagaki articulates how Asian-American studies can benefit from critical insights of Asian lesbians and gays:

[W]e seize the opportunity to recognize non-ethnic based differences—like homosexuality—as an occasion to critique the tendency toward essentialist currents in ethnic-based narratives and disciplines. In short, the practice of including gayness in Asian America rebounds into a reconsideration of the theoretical status of the concept of "Asian American" identity. (14)

By exposing Norman's dark side, Shorb urges us to rethink static perceptions of Asian Americanness bound up with a unitary, ethnic-based male subjectivity and racial separatism. Unless Asian Americans embrace a more inclusive, transnational coalition vision with a vigilant examination of how race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality intersect, Asian straight men (like Norman) will continue to problematically define their

---

<sup>67</sup> Frank Chin is a pioneering Chinese-American activist/author in Asian American movement preoccupied with sexist and heterosexist cultural nationalism.

masculinity through the heterosexist otherization and feminization of gays.

Norman's self-consciousness of his homophobia is underscored by shorb's performance. When he says, "But [. . .] You know, I know some brothas [sic] who's gay (*Pause*). Don't tell anyone, tho'," it creates a very humorous, ironic moment because Norman is performed by "some brotha (FTM shorb)." Norman mentions only (male gay) brothas, excluding lesbian sistahs, but shorb's presence stands for excluded lesbian sistahs and at the same time, another (trans) brotha. Although he whispers, "don't tell anyone," some audiences already know that shorb is a lesbian and aware that even Norman himself is a queer creature in gender bending (a FTM's male impersonation). Depending on individual audiences, their reading of Norman/shorb could vary according to their information about shorb's gender/sexual identity.<sup>68</sup> Norman acknowledges that there exist Asian gays, even if he wants them to remain closeted; his wish is thwarted by shorb's presence. When shorb speaks the lines, "I know some brothas who's gay. Don't tell anyone," it seems that s/he intentionally plays out, to use Rhonda Blair's phrase, the "playful, contradictory oscillation between actor and character" (296). The contrast between the character (a homophobic, straight Asian guy) and performer (a FTM/lesbian) allows for more critical musings on homophobia and nationalist Asian American discourses grounded on the essentialist notion of Asianness. However, when he introspectively says in a sad mood, "What's wrong with me, it's like there's nothing (*point to crotch*)" (*cdc cxvi*), it elucidates that his mild homophobia results from his overcompensation (in a problematic way, though) for racial castration.

---

<sup>68</sup> Considering the intimate, small audience, I assume that many audiences know shorb is a lesbian/queer. But some audience might not know about hir transgender identity.

shorb's impersonation of Norman with hir transgendered, female body effectively comments on and critiques Norman's contradiction because shorb's defiance of the emasculation of Asian masculinity does not involve homophobia, and rather, thrives on hir queer body. shorb reclaims and possesses hir own phallus by performing male characters.

If Norman's monologue portrays a young Asian American man's anxiety of his masculinity in more subcultural and quotidian levels, the character Doctor (a college professor) approaches the phenomenon of racial castration more psychologically by using academic language: particularly, the words of Frantz Fanon. Interestingly enough, both Norman and Doctor – Asian-American characters – reference blackness; Norman draws on black culture (hip-hop speech and gestures) while Doctor relies on black post-colonial discourse. shorb moves on Doctor's monologue as a montage with pictures of shorb as Doctor flashes on screen with the song "Mannish Boy" by Muddy Waters. In the screen-images, the doctor is depicted as an arrogant, self-indulgent, middle-aged, and middle-class intellectual. Doctor wears a beige corduroy jacket, dark grey knit T-shirt, blue jeans, and glasses. The lyrics of "Mannish Boy," connect Norman's aspiration to be a man to Doctor's adult cockiness: "I am a man. I spell mmm, aaa child, nnn. That represents a man. No, B, O child Y. [ . . . ] I'm a full grown man." The song is a very ironic prelude to Doctor's monologue because shorb's point is that "full grown" manhood is deemed by society unattainable for Asian bodies.

After the montage of Doctor's images, the slide of Franz Fanon on the screen is seen until the Doctor's monologue ends as if it frames or even overwhelms Doctor's story. This set-up offers a very striking *mise-en-scène* in that there is a huge portrait of

the dead but historic black male subject, behind shorb's live Japanese-white female body. The slide of Fanon as a background to Doctor's lecture about *Black Skin, White Masks* should be examined carefully with regard to a complicated relationship between the pioneering post-colonial, anti-racist black thinker Fanon and the Asian professor Doctor.

Both Fanon and Doctor as people of color might be agonized by white, European racism, but their racial trauma surrounding masculinity and sexuality leads in opposite directions. Whereas the black phallus is excessively enlarged by the racist link between the black body and hyper-sexuality or primitive animality, the Asian phallus is castrated and desexualized. If Fanon "cannot stand the predominance of his very own penis," Doctor cannot help but accept "No libido, No fetish. The constant of reminder of lack, of void" (*cdc cxviii*). As Doctor quotes, Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*,

Four Negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral. They would be unable to leave the building until their erections had subsided. [. . .] The white man is convinced that Negro is beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. [. . .] [h]e needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify The Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires.

(169, 170)

Feared and threatened by the black phallus, white men constitute their normalized masculinity by projecting their own desire for sexual potency to The Other (black bodies) and demonizing them. Fanon describes this process: "[T]he Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis" (170). Yet in order to fortify the potency of the white phallus, Asian men are relatively emasculated by what is perceived as their "void."

If black men are sexual monsters, Asian men are “defined by a striking absence down there” (Fung 340).

From a different angle, this contrast between Fanon and Doctor makes a critical comment on “the notion that black is the trope for ‘race’” as well as spotlights differences among people of color (Nakayama 163). While the racialized hyper-visibility (“Look, a Negro!”) imposes more severe racial stigmas to blacks – the black man is a threat, after all – Asians are underrepresented or invisible within the white-black binary thinking of race. Fanon is eclipsed as a penis in white imagination, but occupies a position of “a forefather of racial and colonial discourse” (*cdc cxvii*). As a result, it is quite difficult to communicate Asian racial trauma without any mediation through a critical black theory as more “universal” or “intelligible.” Through the reference to Fanon, the Asian-speaking subject acquires more authority and credibility to speak. In addition, the Asian subject is more legible in contrast to black excess. Under the big picture of Fanon on the screen, the Asian professor Doctor’s presence and his obsessive lecture on Fanon highlight the contrast between the racist constructions of the non-white phallus.

Finally, Doctor’s discussion of the enlarged black phallus (black excess) provokes his fury about the racial castration of his own Asian phallus. Doctor as a professor delivers his lecture rationally around the podium on stage right in a classroom setting, making a fist, or putting his hand in his pocket, or adjusting his glasses. In the meantime, he gets excited and reveals his own hysteria when he compares “the burden of manhood” of black and Asian men. The more Doctor’s lecture goes on, the more he loses his control and “civilized” high-class attitude. His analysis of Fanon’s psyche, “plague” or “affliction” leads him to confront his own hysteria. Doctor says, “A plague.

One that is never cured and never goes away! [. . .] It follows us them everywhere, to no end! It's an affliction! An affliction!" (*cdc* cxvii-cxviii) Considering the fact that Doctor is performed by a female body, Doctor's panic echoes shorb's double-lack in conjunction with hir Asian female body. In the middle of his lecture, he crosses abruptly down stage and erupts in rage. He begins jumping up and down, mimicking a monkey, and yells aggressively, "Look [. . .] a Neeeeegro! Nothing but monkey colonials [. . .] Monkeys we are all are. Don't you want a song and dance? [. . .] Pick-a-ninny! Heathen Chink! Sand Nigger! Injun! Jap! Gook! Buck-toothed and savage!" (*cdc* cxviii) He enumerates various people of color as "monkeys" in opposition to the presumed white "humanity" in white racism and Euro-American centrism. This scene echoes the image of a monkey in the video, "task/in- progress" in the beginning of *cdc*. In spite of ethnic differences of marginalized people of color, Doctor relates Negrophobia to other subjugated colonial subjects and other kinds of racism in terms of imposed racial inferiority and Muñoz's concept, "burden of liveness." Although Asian men and black men are differently positioned in a white racist configuration of masculinity, as a cultural mandate, both of them are expected to perform their story of "otherness" for white audiences (Muñoz 1999: 187). By mimicking an enraged monkey, instead of a singing and dancing monkey, shorb undercuts the notion of an exotic entertainer and reminds us that white racist projection of the primitive onto the body of color is nothing more than cultural exploitation.

Doctor closes his monologue by turning to the specifics of Orientalistic prejudice. Doctor raises a provocative series of questions to the audience: "[W]hat if there is nothing to look at? Nothing to see. [. . .] Look, a Chink! What if instead, the child just

doesn't see?" (*cdc* cxviii ) When he says "nothing to look at," he slowly takes off his glasses and asks again, "What am I? Am I? Do you see?" (*ibid*) Analyzing Gallimard's misrecognition of Song's anatomy in *M. Butterfly*, Eng argues that Gallimard "refuses to see at the site of the Asian male body a penis that *is* there to see" (2). In Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the child says in horror, "Look, a Negro!" but the child might not be able to see a Chink at all or might refuse to see a penis in the Asian body. The phrase "nothing to see" points to Asian invisibility in white America and in the black/white binary racial discourse as well as racial castration. Furthermore, Doctor's question, "What am I?" corresponds to shorb's dilemmas about his own hybrid identities and his (il)legibility within the binary systems of man and woman, Asian and American, and Japanese and white.

As another character, Karl, shorb takes issue with the conflation of being a gay bottom<sup>69</sup> and being Asian, as well as racist representations of Asian men in gay pornography. After Doctor's monologue, shorb walks behind the translucent screen upstage and changes clothing to transform into Karl, a gay male porn actor. Karl wears a tight gray t-shirt and jeans, which is a marker of a typical gay fashion. Along with this costume, shorb's speech tone and body languages are radically changed in order to perform gay masculinity/femininity. He raises his chin up and keeps it askew, lifts up his eyes, gestures with his wrist, sits on the bench, crosses his legs, and frequently puts his one hand to the waist in a tilted stance. shorb might enact stereotypical gay gestures

---

<sup>69</sup> A bottom is a person who desires to get sexually penetrated or who becomes penetrated. A top is a person who desires to penetrate or who does the penetrating.

and postures to perform the gay porn actor character, but his performing Karl's fagginess<sup>70</sup> is necessary to contradict his assumed bottomness and to emphasize his actual top identity. Karl's tight t-shirt that says "Pitcher" signifies a gay top, but his story is about how he is bottomized in gay porn. The "Pitcher" shirt resonates with Norman's Yellow Power tattoo and Doctor's anthem, "Mannish Boy"; both reclaim and empower the Asian phallus.

Although Karl is the most comic and feminine character in *cdc*, his faggy, queer masculinity does not imply real-life sexual passivity, subjugation or meekness. However, in reality, he plays Yum Yum Hole, a "Far West" character, in gay porn videos – not a pitcher after all, but a catcher who is frequently penetrated by white penises. He is not a pitcher but a catcher as a hole through which a white penis penetrates. In most gay porn narratives of penile privilege,<sup>71</sup> "the Westerner monopolizes the part of 'top'; Asian is invariably assigned the role of bottom" (Eng 1). As Fung recapitulates, "Asian and anus are conflated" (343). The name Yum Yum Hole intimates the equation of Asianness to gay bottomness and submission, as opposed to the sexual potency of dominant white heterosexual masculinity. In this racial castration, as Karl complains, he cannot have phallic names such as "Spike," "Chris Steel," and "Jeff Stryker," and his sexual subjectivity is also disavowed because of the lack/absence of phallus.

Writing about gay porn, Richard Dyer observes that the narrative of gay porn

---

<sup>70</sup> Fag, short for faggot, has been a pejorative word for effeminate gay men, but some gay men queerly reclaim it as a positive, resistant identity that defies heteronormative masculinity.

<sup>71</sup> In many gay porn movies, white men fuck Asian men. As narratives privilege the (white) penis, the focus of pleasure directs toward a (white) fucker/fucking — the fucker's erection, penetration, and ejaculation, not toward being fucked.

often focuses not on the desire to be fucked, but on the desire to ejaculate, from a top's perspective (qtd. in Fung 343). While a bottom could find pleasure in being fucked as his sexual choice, the problem is that Karl's bottomness is reduced to his Asian servility, and not his individual taste. Further, his submission is linked to desexualization or low libido of Asians. In "Looking for My Penis," Fung articulates that a dominant discourse on racialized sexuality "places East Asians on one end of the spectrum and blacks on the other," whereas "whites fall squarely in the middle, the position of perfect balance" (338). That is, as white sexuality is considered universal and normal, the two non-white extremes – black and Asian sexuality – are respectively hyper-sexualized and desexualized. Karl's subservience as a bottom is attributed to Asians' innate sexual restraint.

Karl starts his monologue in front of the lockers stage left by talking about his yearning to be a muscled top role actor. This locker-room set indicates a gay gym, which is a subcultural space for exchange of sexual desire and for bodily experiences including gaze, nudity, and body obsession. In addition, it is very apt that Karl works in gay porn, an industry that is all about sexualized bodies and sexual pleasure. He opens his locker, checks his arm muscles through the inside mirror. Then, he tells the audience that he is working on building biceps in case he gets a top role. However, as a bottom actor, he does not need to have a muscled body because only his ass is seen in porn videos. Instead, he imagines that he becomes a tough top, thrusting his pelvis and saying "Take it, boy! Take it!" In contrast to Karl's seeming fagness and his bottom role in the porn industry, he reveals his desire to be a top.

One day, Karl comes to have a chance to fill in for a non-Asian top who will “fuck Billy and blow Tom” because of Tony’s (a top role actor) absence in an outdoor scene (*cdc cxix*). Karl could occupy a white top’s position temporarily only when a top actor is not available. On the spot, Chi Chi, the female porn filmmaker, asks to see Karl’s fluffed cock, and amazed by the size, she allows Karl to substitute for Tony. Chi Chi’s surprise at Karl’s penis size exhibits the racist prejudice that presupposes that Asian men have low-libidos – a stereotype derived from the equally ridiculous notions that all Asian men have small penises and all Asian men are effeminate. Karl’s potent penis remains invisible until before it “is discovered” by her.

When Karl impersonates Chi Chi in a very artificial manner and with exaggeration, shorb’s femaleness, Karl’s fagness, and Chi Chi’s femininity as masquerade escalate a Brechtian alienation effect of sex/gender/sexuality. Chi Chi is a biological woman, but she is impersonated by Karl, a gay male character that is played by shorb’s female body. Chi Chi’s femininity is drawn not from shorb’s femaleness but from Karl’s fagness. Through Karl’s impersonation of Chi Chi, shorb magnifies the disjuncture between hir femaleness and femininity. shorb’s female drag of Chi Chi in the character Karl enables hir to perform femininity, “without the risk of slipping into the category of ‘woman’” (Maltz 277). shorb’s performing Chi Chi’s femininity does not undermine hir own masculinity because it is imitated by gay male fagness. The character Karl lets shorb revel in a queerly twisted femininity, dislodging femininity from femaleness, and that in fact, it is an alternative masculinity for hir.

Karl’s fagness requires a careful look at the relationships between the butch/FTMs and gayness. shorb describes hirself as a “tranny-boy-fag-dyke” in the book

*Restoried Selves*, a queer Asian Pacific American anthology (Kumashiro xiii).

Although the “fag” (gay) appears to be incompatible with the “dyke” (lesbian), including shorb, currently, many young lesbians and FTMs identify as fag or appropriate fag personas to explore an alternative, queer masculinity/femininity. Gay fagness transgresses dominant masculinity and provides room to explore the feminine in maleness/or non-femaleness. Moreover, it allows female-born genderqueers to play with gender bending (female to male) as well as to flirt with sexuality blending (lesbian to gay).

Chi Chi’s impromptu casting of Karl as a top also introduces another dense layer of racialized sexuality. Instead of Yum Yum Hole, she gives Karl a new top name, Carlos Rodriguez. Since topness or phallic libido is not congruent with Asianness in the gay porn industry, Chi Chi decides Karl’s race should be changed to a more potent one, Latino. Her casting of Karl as Latino insinuates that Karl is racially ambiguous, and he is able to pass for Latino. Although it is not explicit that Karl is a mixed race character, both in the script and in the performance, shorb writes that Karl was created as a half Asian character drawn from hir own research on mixed race or hapa (part white) gay porn actors (“Masters Report” lxxix). The similar pronunciation of “Karl” and “Carlos” overlaps with a conflation of Asian hapa and Latinos.<sup>72</sup> Karl’s ambiguous-looking racial mixture renders him Latino when he is a top (penis), and as Asian when he is a bottom (ass). He is compelled to forsake his racial/ethnic identity and to fabricate another in order to get a top part. This erasure of Karl’s race – itself a castration of sorts

---

<sup>72</sup> shorb writes that Karl is a “fairly common name for Chinese and Korean American men” (“Masters Report” lxxx).

– also collides with another racist notion: oversexualized Latino sexuality. Karl’s new Latino last name *Rodriguez* signifies, a la the gay porn industry, that Carlos (Karl) has a big and hard “rod” in his body (shorb “Masters Report” lxxx).

Karl’s anecdote about his audition for a top role demonstrates how frustrating the gap between the reality and fantasy is. In the end, Karl was unable to perform the top role – even as Carlos Rodriguez – because of a premature ejaculation. It is important to note that despite his confidence and high libido, he could not maintain an erection for camera. Karl’s failure to adequately perform shows that he was overly pressured when only given a single opportunity, both by Chi Chi and by society’s expectation, to prove his potency. More significantly, it symbolizes that he cannot enter the dominant representation regime with his (Asian) phallus because Asian gender and sexuality are always already castrated in it.

Put in another way, Karl’s failure calls attention to internalized subjectivity within a racist social order. Eng emphasizes that Asian Americans attempt to contest and to dissent from racist significations, but they are also objects of racism who “are continually subjected to institutional structures of material and psychic domination” (28-29). Stuart Hall similarly argues that the power of “*Présence Européenne*” has become a constitutive element in the identity formations of colonial subjects (2003: 242). Karl says, “I’m not Latino. I’m not even Filipino. I know I’m a porn actor, but I still have my self-worth. I know who I am.” He is critically aware of his racial identity and has high self-esteem and confidence, but he is unable to re-erect for camera, in front of the racist lens that commands his castration.

According to shorb’s intention, Karl’s premature ejaculation results from his over

excitement – his libido is in fact too big.<sup>73</sup> Yet his premature ejaculation was apt to be read by the audience as merely accidental or inconsequential, especially as it was only in a brief and unmarked moment. As an audience member, I felt that Karl’s multifaceted subjectivity surrounding his failure was overlooked, and I wondered if his fagness might run the risk of reifying the presumed sexual impotence of the Asian gay and of confirming his bottomness. In a conversation with me, shorb explained that if Karl were to succeed in being a top without any problem, the character would be too simple to bring up complex issues, and that s/he wanted to implicate Karl in some troubled relationship of the dominant representation system, through his flaw.<sup>74</sup> While I appreciate hir point, it seems to me that to effectively fulfill hir intention, shorb should have clarified the complex implications of Karl’s failure through his speech.

As Karl finishes his monologue, he asks the audience if he could switch studios and use the name Carlos. He believes that it would be possible because people cannot recognize his face only with “three shots of his ass,” since all of his porn videos focus on his ass rather than his face. Karl’s frustration suggests that there exist numerous, undistinguishable Asian or Asian hapa asses (Holes) in gay porn. Under this devastating reality, he starts fantasizing again a scene where he fucks a white ass. Gesturing toward an imaginary white boy on the ground, he says, “You think you can fuck me? I’ll show you what a REAL fuck!” and tells the audience, “I’ve gotta thing to prove: I gotta dick, and I know how to use it!” He reclaims his phallus by topping a white bottom, reversing the power dynamic. In his mind, the only way to ensure his

---

<sup>73</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr 18, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr 18, 2006.

potency and to recuperate his phallus is to “push some white boy’s face to the ground and fuck him open,” almost like a punishment or violation. By topping a white bottom, he overturns and literally overcomes the racial stereotypes of Asian gay men as effeminate, submissive bottoms. After an imaginary climax, he utters in naughty satisfaction, “Yum Yum Hole.” Yum Yum Hole becomes a name for a white bottom, and Karl achieves the right to call a white his Hole. However, his topping a white bottom is possible only in his fantasy, not in a real filming scene because the white racist imagery in gay porn impels the Asian phallus to be castrated.

Karl’s fantasy of topping in gay anal sex overlaps with the exertion of masculinity and sexual potency of shorb’s Asian transgender body. shorb performs Karl’s topping fantasy in a white undershirt and boxers.<sup>75</sup> Right before Karl starts fantasizing, s/he begins taking off Karl’s pitcher T-shirt, Jeans, and socks. Strictly speaking, shorb is not Karl anymore after s/he undresses Karl’s clothing, but s/he is not another character, yet. shorb still plays Karl’s fantasy, but hir costume signals a transition. In the white undershirt and boxers, hir female body is very visible, in spite of hir chest binding. In “Boundaries: Gender and Transgenderism,” Michael M. Hernandez questions, “If breast size does not preclude a butch identity, why would it preclude a male gender identity?” and asserts that butches can act out their fantasies of being gay men (63, 65).<sup>76</sup> shorb

---

<sup>75</sup> S/he wore the same white undershirt and boxer in the video “task/in-progress.”

<sup>76</sup> Usually, the term butch refers to masculine lesbians who identify as a woman. However, like Hernandez’s words, I find in current lesbian cultures that some butches enjoy their fantasy of being a gay man or are attracted to gay sexuality without male-identification or FTM transgender identity. This phenomenon is also related to the increase of relationships of butch to butch, butch to FTM, and FTM to FTM. Similarly, some transmen become gay and have a relationship with male gays after their transition. Such new and fluid gender/sexual practices collapse the old definition of gender and sexuality and even refuse categorization itself.

acts imaginary gay anal sex, specifically topping over a white bottom, in the state which hir female body remains more exposed. What is interesting is that it looks like shorb is not just “performing” Karl’s fantasy but also appropriating it as hir own. In performing Karl’s fantasy, the relationships between the character and the performer and significations of sex, gender, and sexuality are multiplied and escape from any fixed definition. Performing male gay sex with hir female body allows shorb to explore hir “fantasies and perceptions of masculinity and male personas” (Hernandez 63). It seems to me that shorb’s male impersonation with a queer female body empowers and enhances hir masculinity in a playful and indeterminate state of flux.

shorb’s performing gay sex might be best examined in reference to Butler’s “lesbian phallus.” Butler writes, “In so far as the phallus signifies an idealization of morphology, [. . .] one which no body can adequately approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization” (1993: 86). By performing fluffing, pelvic thrusting, and ejaculation in the absence of a penis, shorb proves that the phallus can be possessed by a female body without maleness. Hir lack is equivalent to the deficiency of all males who anxiously try to approximate the ideal phallus. shorb’s FTM trans masculinity and Karl’s emasculated gay/Asian masculinity mirror each other in light of their lack of a white (male) phallus.

Karl’s desire for a phallus is transferable to shorb’s lesbian phallus in a “double vision” of theatre: seeing the actor (female body) and character (gay male) at once (Solomon 1997:17). Solomon offers a compelling explanation of how butch acting operates for gender subversion by making a connection between the double vision of

self-conscious theatre and Brechtian epic acting.<sup>77</sup> She maintains,

[T]he butch reveals the conventions of masculinity while at the same time her self-presentation of the butch allows the possibility of femininity, the role she is refusing, to be inferred. [. . .] at once the butch demonstrates the choice she's refusing and claims the ground she can't have. This is the tempting contradiction the *V-effekt* of her epic acting reveals. (1997: 171)

The audience sees Karl's performed masculinity through shorb's female body. Hence, the incongruity between hir femaleness and Karl's masculinity is more foregrounded in the very "penile" actions. Since shorb does not or cannot hide hir femaleness underneath Karl, the rupture between shorb and Karl facilitates commentary on the character as a "function of particular socio historical relations, a conduit of particular choices" (Diamond 1996: 127). That is why shorb as Karl produces more humor and pleasure.

The character Dean's monologue represents an Asian female queer gender under racial and gender bashing, which begins with the female-bodied character's shaving scene. Whereas all the characters in *cdc* are Asian men, the character Dean is a masculine Asian hapa (part white) "female" character and is almost completely autobiographical.<sup>78</sup> shorb takes off male impersonation and performs hir own

---

<sup>77</sup> Although shorb identifies as transgender, I think that Solomon's contention is applicable to FTM performers. shorb's gender performance in *cdc* does not address any specificity of transgenderism and is almost the same as butch performance.

<sup>78</sup> According to shorb, the name Dean was hir first drag king persona modeled on James Dean in the film *Rebel Without a Cause* ("Masters Report" lxxxi).

masculinity and story through the character of Dean. After Karl's monologue, shorb, still wearing only the white undershirt and boxer, moves toward stage left and brings a cart with a basin to the center stage in the spotlight. shorb as Dean washes hir face with water in the basin and applies shaving cream on hir face, looking at an imaginary mirror in front of hir. Then s/he shaves with a razor. shorb has a real beard and actually needs to shave in real-life. As Dean does not mention hir beard, audiences cannot know whether hir shaving is a kind of symbolic ritual or hir daily routine. The audience might wonder if s/he grew a natural beard or if she is taking testosterone. Therefore, it is hard for the audience to find a clear reference to what it means to be a bearded female and to the relationship between hir beard and transgender identity. shorb intended to signify a "white mask" (white assimilation) with the white shaving foam, but it was not legible at all in the performance,<sup>79</sup> because Dean only put shaving cream on the half portion (bottom side) of hir face, and the shaving foam hardly looked like a mask. Without Dean's special comment on the shaving foam, the audience is likely to assume that shaving is merely a male or masculine activity without any racial connotation. Since shorb centers on gender trouble in Dean's monologue, s/he wanted to address racial implications in the queer gender practice through shaving (shaving foam/white mask). But as shorb acknowledges, it misfired.<sup>80</sup> If it had worked, shaving as a constant labor and washing off of white assimilation would have produced an intriguing analogy. Just as shorb needs to shave hir growing beard, s/he has to strip off the white mask because it is constantly covered. Besides, it is very interesting that the emphasis on Dean's

---

<sup>79</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr 18, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr18, 2006.

(masculine) gender identity through shaving is linked to masking hir “real” race or passing for white and white assimilation.

Although Dean seems to shave in hir own private bathroom, wearing underwear T-shirt and boxers, the shaving scene demonstrates the constant policing of female masculinity and racial bashing. As Sally R. Munt articulates, the public restroom is “a breach-zone between public and private, between gender and the body” (1998: 201). In this context, it is significant that shorb locates the shaving scene in a liminal space between public and private and in an Althusserian interpellation-site of gendered body discipline. While Dean shaves in silence, the audience hears a recorded voice-over full of racist and homophobic words.<sup>81</sup> It says, “What’re you? Chainese? Chjapanese? [. . .] Hey! That’s the wrong room! [. . .] That dude just went into the ladies room! [. . .] Fucking cunt sucking faggots! [. . .] Who’s a good little boy? You are! Who’s a good little girl? You are!” (*cdc cxxi*). To adopt Dolan’s vocabulary, shorb’s body “becomes a political palimpsest of experience and resistance” (1989: 152). Since during the voice-over, Dean is speechless, the voice-over sounds like social coercion and regulatory interrogation. At the same time, because of that, hir shaving without saying anything looks like persistent resistance. Whether shorb intends or not, hir image as Dean is a political statement in that s/he refuses to accept hir “place as a properly feminine woman in society” (Inness 1998: 236).

The shaving scene also evokes the public bathroom problem of female genderqueers. The public bathroom is an arena “of intense scrutiny and observation”

---

<sup>81</sup> This voice-over was recorded in shorb’s own voice.

for “the enforcement of gender conformity” (Halberstam 1998: 21, 24). Like shorb, many masculine women have trouble using a public women’s restroom. Frequently, masculine women experience insults, physical violence, and even arrests in bathrooms because they are seen as gender deviants, “not-woman and not-man” (Halberstam 1998: 21). As shorb’s voice-over illustrates, gender-ambiguous females are often treated as an intruder in a safe, female-only space. By contesting gender norms, they cause “an immediate and dangerous threat to the ‘sanctity’” of the category of “woman” (Browne 339). According to Richard M. Juang, since many women conceive of bathrooms as “extensions of their sexed personhood,” they regard the presence of different (“abnormal”) bodies as a violation of the sex of their own bodies (247). As Dean’s masculinity is marked as “wrong,” hir masculine body cannot “rest” in women’s restrooms. Through the voice-over, shorb evidences how public bathrooms can be “sites where individual’s bodies are continually policed and (re)placed within sexed categories” (Browne 332). For a female-bodied transgender with a natural beard, using public bathrooms is a daily struggle confronting punishment for hir ambiguous, hence illegitimate, gender.

In the article of “Orifices in Space: Making the Real Impossible,” Munt asserts that vigilant patrolling and scrutinizing gender in women’s rest rooms also stem from the homophobic fear of lesbianism.

Toilets are, crucially, environments of contagion. Homosexuality, similarly, is haunted by the discourse of contagion. [. . .] [h]ence the threat must be contained by denotation (‘Are you a man or a woman?’). [. . .] [m]y *body* is read ‘correctly’ as female, but my *gender* causes the

problem, hence the question ‘Are you a man or a woman?’ is a displacement of the unutterable ‘Are you a lesbian?’ [. . .] Without gender there is no heterosexuality. The butch in the toilet, then, reinserts the pervasive ambiguity which is the failure of denotation, due to the irretrievably sliding signifier. (1998: 205-206)

Dean might be able to prove that s/he is a female with hir visible breasts and high voice. Although hir body is read as “female,” s/he cannot avoid staring inspections from heteronormative women. At the moment when Dean is recognized as not-man, s/he is dehumanized as a “fucking pervert.” Dean would be still “shamed by rebuke, revulsion, producing a tormenting confirmation” of hir outlaw status (Munt 1998 “Orifices in Space”: 205).<sup>82</sup> Dean’s gender-ambiguous body provokes lesbophobia. During Dean’s shaving, the derogatory voice-over changes its target from a dude in the wrong room to a “fucking cunt sucking faggot.”

With the shaving scene, shorb juxtaposes gender dysphoria with racial ambiguity, and gender policing with homophobia and racism. In “Flunking Basic Gender Training,” Inness asserts that the butch’s trouble in using a public restroom points out their “lack of belonging” in this society: they are neither heterosexual women nor men (1998: 233). Because of Dean’s racial mixture, hir gender unbelonging extends to hir racial unbelonging. The voice-over keeps saying:

Put the boy scout uniform back in the closet. I bought you this new dress. [. . .] Lezzie! Lezzie! [. . .] [h]e saw you kissing this girl. [. . .] [h]

---

<sup>82</sup> If women in ladies rooms were to notice Dean’s beard “and” breasts, their disgust to hir gender ambiguity would be more intense.

said you acted like you were a guy or something. [. . .] They need to teach you some fucking manners before you come to this country. You fuckin' Chink! All you know how to do is fuck, lie, and steal! [. . .] [w]hat, exactly, *are* you? [. . .] [w]here are you from? (*cdc cxxi*)

Dean's Asian hapa lesbian body and nonconforming gender are placed under constant interrogation because s/he deviates from heterosexual femininity and whiteness as naturalized universality. The voice-over functions as a panoramic flashback of shorb's oppression as a gender outlaw, lesbian, and an Asian hapa throughout hir life. It also denotes that those multiple marginalized identities are inseparable for shorb, and that race and sexuality converge in the construction and performance of female masculinity.

shorb illustrates the subtle ways people display their ignorant racism when encountering hir Asian bi-raciality. shorb's voice-over continues, "You look Mediterranean. You look Hispanic. You look Arab. [. . .] You look Hindu, do you know Yoga? [. . .] I dated this Korean guy who looked just like you. I like Thai food. I visited Vietnam once" (*ibid*). As such, the words of the voice-over do not consider a possibility of mixed race and only attach to a pure, single ethnicity in order to decode shorb's racial ambiguity. Multiracial individuals of Asian descent are frequently required to explain their race and ethnicity, responding to the question, "What are you?" (*Williams 61*). Some non-Asian people's ignorance of Asian culture homogenizes all Asian countries as a singular group. There is no distinction and difference among Indian Yoga, Thai cuisine, and tours to Vietnam because Asia is a homogenous, foreign, and exotic site outside the U.S. Not knowing that the homogenization of Asianness is another racist stereotyping, they tend to think that having a conversation about Asian

food and travel is a “nice” way to relate to and address Asian people. But would a Japanese-white American like shorb automatically know about Yoga, Thai cooking, and the scenery of Vietnam just because s/he has half-Japanese blood? Obviously not.

shorb as Dean ends the shaving scene and starts putting on a man’s suit in order to accentuate hir embodied masculinity in opposition to hir female drag of Japanese femininity, showing a picture of hir in a kimono. As the racist and homophobic voice-over stops, Dean washes hir face with water in the basin and resolutely wipes off the white shaving cream residue with a towel as if s/he cleans away the racist, homophobic insults of the voice-over, and heals the hurts they caused. Then, as Frank Sinatra’s “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” plays, s/he puts the cart back to the corner of stage left and walks toward hir displayed suit upstage right. Sinatra’s song plays until Dean is fully dressed in hir shirt, pants, socks, and shoes. shorb continues the rest of Dean’s monologue while wearing hir dress shirt, pants, socks, and hir necktie. Behind Dean, the big screen on the platform upstage presents slides of shorb’s pictures in a kimono. Changing the mood, s/he says, “Come in, come in. I’m just getting ready,” which is reminiscent of the character Shité (hir grandfather)’s introduction, “Welcome, welcome!” While Dean puts on hir suit, s/he looks up the slide of hirself in a kimono in hir teenaged-years and says, “Look at that stunning kimono!” Again, this line is the same repetition of Shité’s line when he talked about his wood statue slide. By drawing parallels between Dean and Shité, shorb reminds us of the analogy between female impersonation in Noh theatre and hir own female masculinity. Just as Shité shows his slides as an evidence of performing femininity, shorb displays hir own picture in a kimono as a female drag, “playing the girl daughter.”

Through this kimono slide scene, shorb revisits drag performance tradition of hir Japanese family and critically summons hir Japanese traces. In the kimono slide picture, shorb sits on a chair with hir Japanese mother and white father who stand behind hir. S/he wears a bright pink kimono with splendid patterns and thick make-up in “a relic of Japanese ruling class imperial femininity” (*cdc* cxxii). Dean emphasizes the upper-class status of hir mother’s family by stating that hir grandfather commissioned the kimono from a renowned clothier. It corresponds to Shité’s line, “I commissioned it [a wood statue] from a very renowned wood sculptor.” Dean makes more connections with hir Japanese family by introducing that hir mother would play men’s parts in her girl’s school, dressed up as James Dean. In other words, shorb is a second generation of a “Dean” performer. Dean adds, “I am last in a long line of cross-dressers,” which testifies to what part of hir family/Japanese heritage s/he appropriates as hir own. Whereas Shité said, “I was last in a long line of nobility” (*cdc* cxiv), shorb reclaims theatrical gender performance as hir family tradition, instead of class privilege.

Dean reconfigures the definition of cross-dressing through the reinterpretation of hir performing femininity in a kimono. S/he maintains that real cross-dressing for hir is not wearing the suit but wearing a kimono. Pointing to hir suit and kimono of the slide in turn, Dean highlights the contrast between hir masculinity (suit) with Japanese femininity (kimono). In doing so, s/he underscores the subversive incongruity between hir biological sex and gender and affirms that masculinity is as intimate as skin for hir. As Dean puts on hir white dress shirt and suit pants, s/he moves toward the center stage,

bringing a red necktie in hir hand.<sup>83</sup> And Dean explains more why masculinity means well-fitting clothes for hir by broaching hir long fetish of neckties from the childhood. Tying the red necktie, s/he says, “I stole one [necktie] when I was little. I kept it in a bag and took it with me. [. . .] It was soft but firm. I caressed it as I fastened. I smiled and inhaled. It felt like a home” (*cdc* cxxii). Finishing tying hir tie, Dean articulates, “To some, it is a bind, a shackle. To me, it was liberation. It was me. [. . .] I felt, unbound.” If femininity is a kind of artificial acting and alien thing, hir (female) masculinity is viewed as natural embodiment or true belonging. In the voice-over of the previous shaving scene, s/he was obliged to wear itchy girl “tights” instead of a Boy Scout uniform when s/he was young. Dean’s love for hir necktie assures that the feminine kimono and girly “tights” are a “shackle,” a “bind” to straitjacket hir real (masculine) self.

It is imperative to examine what kind of masculinity gives Dean a sense of home and freedom. Dean’s luxurious suit undeniably marks hir as upper- or middle-class. shorb remarks that when s/he was a child, s/he would search hir father’s middle-class closet and want to look like hir father (shorb 2004: 103). It is not clear whether crooner style, but Sinatra’s song playing in the background and the image of the suit enacting a Sinatra style is related to hir long affinity with white middle-class masculinity in hir

---

<sup>83</sup> In hir e-mail correspondence with me on Oct 31, 2007, shorb writes, “[t]he tie was given to me by my mother. it [sic] was one of the last gifts she gave me before she died. it’s [sic] very significant to me because it was a way that she basically told me she was okay with me being trans or butch or whatever.” Considering that hir mother played male roles on stage in her girl’s school, shorb’s red necktie represents the tradition of cross-gender performance in hir Japanese family as well as hir masculine fetishism for trans masculinity. It also bears shorb’s love for hir mother and hir mother’s acceptance of shorb’s queer masculinity. Furthermore, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the U.S. (specifically in New York), wearing a red necktie was a symbol of male homosexuality and gay identity, like a gay badge (Katz 81). In resonance with the gay reference to it, Dean’s red necktie queers white/Sinatra masculinity.

family or not. One might argue that Dean just feels at home in “a” mellow make audiences directly connect Dean/shorb with Sinatra.<sup>84</sup> More importantly, Sinatra is a representative figure of dominant (white middle-class) masculinity. As I discussed above, shorb seemed to be critically aware of class privilege of hir Japanese family and to strive to distance himself from it. On the contrary, in Dean’s monologue, it looked like s/he returns to hir class background. Might the word “home” mean not only a queer gender home but also a middle-class home? Pointing to hir suit, Dean says, “Not that this is completely devoid of rulers and empires,” comparing hir suit with hir kimono of “imperial femininity” (*cdc cxxii*). This line indicates that Dean does not blindly admire hir suit. Yet hir words are too short and quick to draw the audience’s attention, and are also the only astute commentary on hir suit that Dean offers in hir monologue.

I am not suggesting that shorb must suppress and part from hir middle-class background or s/he should not employ a middle-class masculinity. In addition, I am not insisting that shorb should be skeptical of a man’s suit, or that performing a gentlemanly masculinity in reference to Sinatra is problematic. My point is that the way s/he structures Japanese femininity and American middle-class masculinity in opposition crucially shapes audiences’ reception. Specifically, it should not be overlooked that since Dean is the only one autobiographical character in *cdc*, Dean’s gender display is more likely to represent shorb’s gender identity. It seemed to me that shorb’s sharp awareness of class and race suddenly evaporates in the passionate celebration of gender

---

<sup>84</sup> shorb writes in the stage directions, “*More like the end of the Sinatra show. Ceremoniously put hat on*” (*cdc cxxii*). Since s/he specifies hir reference to Sinatra, the stylistic quotation of him in Dean’s monologue is beyond doubt.

transgression in Dean's monologue. As an Asian audience member, it was somehow uncomfortable for me to see Asian hyper femininity in the kimono on the slide in contrast to Western masculinity on stage. Certainly, shorb takes prides in hir Japaneseness by reclaiming the gender-bending tradition in hir Japanese family – hir grandfather's female impersonation and hir mother's male impersonation. Nevertheless, I was afraid the comparison reinforced the dichotomies of Japanese/American, feminine/masculine, traditional/modern, and kimono-wearing/suit-wearing. In this bipolar framework, Asia is envisioned as a site of gender confinement/conformity, and America as a site of gender subversion/liberation. I understand that shorb intended to denaturalize female femininity by showing hir female drag in a kimono. Yet in so doing, inevitably, s/he "otherizes" Japaneseness as a receptacle of femininity, identifying with Western masculinity. As compulsory femininity is embodied in the kimono, and shorb's gender euphoria is explored in the necktie and suit, is there not a danger that Asianness (Japaneseness) is equated with the feminine or the conservative?

In a different light, it could be argued that shorb's adoption of Sinatra's style is an attempt to incorporate hir Asian hapa female body and hir Americanness; instead of a kimono, shorb clothes hir Asian hapa body in a "Western" gentleman's suit. In that sense, Dean's Sinatra style not only enacts a general gender bending but also proclaims legitimate American citizenship. Asian Americans are regarded as "perpetual foreigners" or "unassimilable aliens" in white America (Eng 204, Lee 116), hence, Asian Americans have difficulty validating their Americanness and being recognized as American. Dean's suit and Sinatra's song engage in issues of class, race, gender, and even nationality/citizenship, and may offer shorb a way of integrating queer Asian female

masculinity and Americanness. When the song “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” plays, the “you” initially refers to the masculinity announced by his necktie and suit.

However, the meaning of “you” grows even more multivalent when one considers that shorb is a half-white, and that Sinatra is a hallmark of American white masculinity.

Echoing the lyrics: “I’ve got you under my skin/I’ve got you deep in the heart of me/So deep in my heart, that you’re really a part of me,” it is plausible that shorb embraces his half-whiteness in his queer masculinity through the appropriation of a Sinatra style.

shorb expands the implications of the lyrics “you under my skin” by including all of the Asian male characters that s/he has performed in *cdc*. In the final scene, as the music turns into Charlie Parker’s instrumental version of “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” Dean puts on his suit jacket and takes out a very Sinatra-like panama hat. Then, montages of Shité, Norman, Doctor, Karl and Dean flash on the screen like a collage, as does the written text “under my skin,” symbolizing that all of these characters are components of his masculinity. Although all the characters except for Dean are Asian men that shorb impersonates, by means of the music and the sign “under my skin,” they are reclaimed as the lyrics suggest as a part of shorb’s heart. That is, as an Asian hapa, just as white (Sinatra) masculinity is a part of shorb, the female impersonator in *Noh*, the Angry Asian hip-hop boy, the Asian post-colonial intellectual, and the Asian hapa gay porn bottom actor inhabit and constitute his body and identities.

Nevertheless, the question remains why shorb chose to focus on racial castration of Asian men rather than his own trans masculinity; the monologues of the Asian male characters overwhelm that of shorb’s autobiographical character Dean. Moreover, aspects of shorb’s white father and of his half whiteness are almost left out and erased

except for Sinatra's white masculinity throughout the performance. The issue of mixed-race is only very briefly addressed in Karl's monologue, and shorb touches on hir own bi-racial identity in Dean's monologue only with the voice-over and hir family picture. Even the voice-over in Dean's monologue is about what s/he has heard, not what s/he speaks. We cannot know how Dean/shorb conceives and negotiates hir mixed race in formulating hir trans masculinity. Dean's masculinity and public bathroom problems are not distinctive from general experiences of the butch or masculine women. As an Asian hapa FTM, shorb's work and body have the potential to unsettle the conventional conceptions and exclusive categories of gender and race. For that reason, I had hoped that she would explore and disclose more personal layers regarding those "third" identities or "in-betweens." Certainly, the fact that all the male characters breathe "under hir skin" hints at shorb's trans identity. Yet since in Dean's monologue, there is no clear sign of hir trans identity,<sup>85</sup> the particularity of bi-racial FTM transgenderism is buried under generic lesbian butchness. Despite shorb's hapa appearance, because of the predominant Asian themes, contents, and characters, hir body is prone to be overly marked as Asian (or Japanese), decolorizing hir half whiteness. As shorb's autobiographical input is curtailed and minimized, it seems that Asian male masculinity dominates hir Asian hapa trans identity.

Responding to my critical inquiry, shorb replies that the main purpose of *cdc* is to take up the issue of racial castration of Asian men and to represent their recuperation of the usurped phallus. That is why s/he focused on Asian male stories rather than hir

---

<sup>85</sup> Shaving in Dean's monologue does not automatically indicate hir trans identity.

autobiographical character. In addition, shorb remarks that she cut out much of Dean's monologue in the several revisions of it so that s/he can make Dean's monologue more succinct and metaphoric, avoiding too descriptive, didactic, or somber of a style ("Masters Report" lxxii-lxxxiii). In my interview with hir, s/he mentions that since whiteness is not counted as "a" race in white America, hir half whiteness is unmarked as a race.<sup>86</sup> shorb stresses that due to hir visible Asian appearance in a racist society, Asianness has been the core source of hir oppression and critical consciousness.<sup>87</sup> As shorb attaches importance to criticizing racial castration of Asian men, hir Asian hapanness and trans identity are relatively absorbed into a Japanese-American butch's story. Yet hir foregrounding Asian identity and privileging anti-racist politics on stage prove the contrary: that white racism toward Asian-Americans is deep, and that Asian voices have been unheard and marginalized in white America.

This conversation with shorb inspired me to think about hir performance as racial passing. In general, passing is understood as opting for a more privileged position such as "from 'minority' to 'majority' status or from 'one minority' status to 'the more acceptable minority'" (Williams 62). Asian hapas can pass as white, depending on the situation, and some of them intentionally pass for white. However, in shorb's case, faced with Orientalism and racism, s/he politically chooses to pass down for Asian. But actually, shorb's strong Asian-identification (or passing for Asian) is a political resistance in order to empower hir Asian identity and to encourage a keen criticism of whiteness and white racism toward Asians.

---

<sup>86</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr 18, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> My interview with shorb on Apr 18, 2006.

Considering the politics of passing of multiracial individuals of Asian descents, Teresa Kay Williams underlines that the passing process occurs in very complex interactions of a passer, audiences/readers, and social circumstances and contexts (62). It implies that a passer cannot control his or her intentions, and that misrecognition or unintentional passing could happen. According to Williams,

“[P]assing” does not necessitate taking place objectively, consistently, or even rationally. [. . .] Can a multiracial individual pass for what he or she is *not*? Can a multiracial individual pass for what she or she is? [. . .] Michael Thornton’s conceptual distinction between “personal” and “social” identity may explain why one’s personal understanding of self does not necessarily coincide with his or her public articulation of “self.” (62-63)

Applying Williams’ ideas to shorb’s performance, it becomes clear that hir racial passing is also limited by the audience’ ability to read hir race and by the dominant representation system regarding the Asian body. Do not the audience think that shorb is performing hir own Asianness, not seeing hir half whiteness? If the audience does not read hir mixed race, the factor of racial passing is glossed over, and they might be convinced that s/he is just acting out hir own “authentic” Aisanness. Still being aware of shorb’s Japanese-white body, can they interpret that s/he is intentionally highlighting hir Asian identity? How is shorb’s Asian hapa body marked and racialized by the audience?

These questions are relevant to shorb’s difficulty to mark explicitly hir hapaness in a performance that focuses on the racial castration of Asian males. In hir political investment in racial castration of Asian men, hir hapa identity cannot but be sublimated.

shorb's body size might also be deeply involved in the possibility to read hir race as exclusively Asian, based on the dominant assumption that Asians are short. With hir hapanness, shorb reveals the performative nature of race and passing. However, the questions of what is perceived to be passing and how well s/he is able to deconstruct race and ethnicity are contingent on audiences' competency and positionality. I have examined how shorb criticizes the emasculation of Asian masculinity, and how s/he portrays Asian male characters who wrestle with the racial castration of Asian men. In doing so, I have discussed the stakes that reside in hir transgendered Asian hapa female body in performance at the intersections of gender, class, race, and ethnicity. In the following subchapter, I will analyze how Tamil Sri Lankan D'Lo embodies a black hip-hop masculinity and impersonates male feminist characters in *Ramble-Ations* (2006). In the chapter conclusion, I will compare shorb's and D'Lo's styles and strategies of performing Asian masculinities in terms of the differences of their skin color/ethnicity and positionality in racial politics.

### **D'Lo's *Ramble-Ations***

She (D'Lo) comes with packages of stories,  
bags of jokes,  
bundles of sincere interest.

—D'Lo (2004)<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> *Ballin' with My Bois* by written and directed by D'Lo. It was performed at the WOW Café in NYC in 2004. D'Lo played the character J.C. in the play. This epigraph, which is directed to the character J.C., is from the character Liza's monologue, "MY HE." For reference, although the word, "balling" is used as slang for having sex, in *Ballin' with My Bois*, it does not connote any sexual meaning. It means playing baseball. *Ballin' with My Bois* is an unpaginated, unpublished script. I am very grateful to D'Lo for giving me the script of *Ballin' with My Bois*.

D’Lo, an L.A.-based performer/poet/community activist, blends hip-hop spoken word with stand-up comedy and theatre, and plays with the trappings of blackness and racial ambiguity. Although the name D’Lo might remind one of “down low,” which is slang for a closeted urban black gay man, she devised her new name for the sake of making good rhymes. She says, “My mum always called me Dillo, but I started doing serious music, the only thing my name rhymed with was things like pillow! So I changed it a bit to D’Lo” (Bhumika K).<sup>89</sup> Considering her racial ambiguity on and off stage, it is interesting that her name does not mark her Asian descent, sounding more like the name of a black or Latino(a) person.

D’Lo wrote and performed *Ballin’ with My Bois* (*BMB*, 2004) and *Ramble-Ations* (2006). *BMB* is comprised of monologues and conversations featuring diverse queer characters of color whose different ethnic, racial, sexual, and gender identities serve as a context for both friendship and the engagement of each others’ differences, diversity, and the contradictions in their social positions.<sup>90</sup> In current lesbian cultures, many lesbians and FTM transgenders use the term “boi” or “bois (boyz)” instead of “boy” in order to define female masculinity and to mark queer reclamation of being a boy. Although D’Lo directed the production, she played a minor character in *BMB*. Hence, to focus on Asian solo performance in this chapter, I exclude *BMB* in my close reading and instead refer to it only in order to contextualize her work in relation to her gender identity.

---

<sup>89</sup> D’Lo does not divulge her real name and uses the name D’Lo in her personal relationships in everyday life.

<sup>90</sup> *BMB* is not a solo-performance piece, but a conventional play with a narrative. D’Lo plays only one character, J.C., who is not marked or specified as having an Asian ethnicity, and all other characters are performed by other actors. In *BMB*, most characters are queers of color, but it also includes a few white or straight characters.

Since the intersections of D’Lo’s social identities are rooted in her performance, I want to closely look at her ethnic, sexual, and gender identification. To begin with, I examine her multiple identities,<sup>91</sup> focusing on her poems and prose in her self-published book, *No Shame . . . Part 1, 2, and 3*.<sup>92</sup> Then I discuss the implications and significance of her embodiment of a hip-hop aesthetic in terms of multicultural hybridity. The politics and subculture of hip-hop have been crucial for D’Lo in formulating her artistry and masculinity. Specifically, her spoken-word pieces cannot be fully understood without explication of their hip-hop aesthetic and spirit. In addition, I contextualize how “hip-hop” and “Hindu” converge and intertwine in her South-Asian diasporic experiences and in her performance. Lastly, I outline how she attaches importance to comedy, and how comedy plays a pivotal role in her work. With these contexts, I will conduct my textual and performance analysis of *Ramble-Ations*.

D’Lo intentionally identifies herself as a Tamil Sri Lankan gay (woman)<sup>93</sup>. She is concerned with the under-representation and the marginalization of Sri Lankan-Americans in Asian and/or South Asian-American discourses:

Ain’t no one ever really included us in the South Asian diaspora. We’re a small island with big issues. [. . .] [o]ne of our people speaks up and says, ‘Hey, you forgot Sri Lanka.’ [. . .] All the South Asian communities

---

<sup>91</sup> I pay special attention to her gender identity/masculinity. I am interested in how performers conceive their own masculinity, and how they reflect or present it in their performance. D’Lo’s configuration of her gender identity is reflected in performing herself and male characters in *Ramble-Ations*.

<sup>92</sup> *No Shame . . . Part 1, 2, and 3* are written by D’Lo. It is her anthology of poetry, performance pieces, spoken word, prose, and short stories. D’Lo self-published Part 1 and 2 with a Xerox binding in 2004 and Part 3 in the same form in 2006. I am very grateful to D’Lo for getting me *No Shame . . . Part 1, 2, and 3*.

<sup>93</sup> D’Lo’s gay identity does not entail male-identification or trans-identification. She uses the term gay as a uni-sex term, which refers to male gays and lesbians. She identifies as a woman with a gay identity.

are different from each other, but for so many obvious reasons. [. . .] India was like a whole notha [sic] type of place, sometimes as foreign to us as China or Africa. (2006 *No Shame . . . Part 3*: 31)

In general, Asian visibility tends to center on East Asians, like the Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans. Even South Asians are frequently equated with Indians, without consideration for diverse nationalities and ethnicities within Asia. That is why she rarely identifies as an (unspecified) Asian. Besides, her self-identification serves to mark her as Tamil, an ethnic minority directly affected by the long-lasting internal conflicts between Singhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka.<sup>94</sup> D’Lo’s strong affinity and outspokenness for her Tamil Sri Lankan identity defy the marginalization of Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka and of Sri Lankans in America. It seems to me that the ethnic and religious split and oppression in Sri Lanka has made her foster an aspiration for peace and desire to promote her critical generosity of differences and diversity. Although D’Lo does not always bring up the issues of Sri Lanka, themes of love, peace, passion for social justice, and inclusive multiculturalism are always featured prominently in her performance.

D’Lo’s gay-identification pertains to the racialization of sexual terminology. She remarks that she rarely heard the word “lesbian” around her gay neighborhood and community in Lancaster and L.A. while she was developing her gay identity, and that the term “lesbian” denotes whiteness (white lesbians) to her. Due to her affinity to older gay women of color (mostly black), “gay” has been a more familiar and natural label to

---

<sup>94</sup> In Sri Lanka, Tamil is a minority because most of the population is made up of Singhalese Buddhists. Generally, it is believed that the Sri Lankan is Buddhist at the expense of marginalizing Tamil Hindus. That is why she always emphasizes her ethnicity and religion as a Tamil Hindu.

her. Her gay identification without a female marker is also linked to her boi identity. She writes in “OBSERVATIONS: AGE23, Loving The Fart that India Let Off the Side of Its Ass . . . [sic],”

I was Appa [dad]’s lil boy. [. . .] Me n Appa, my best friend, the man I was going to be just like. [. . .] But naked? I’m not a girl. I am, Obviously and Gloriously, a woman, I have no plans on surgery, in case you’re wondering. [. . .] And clothed in the streets? I am a boy. A little one. [. . .] I’m just a [. . .] fag-acting boy who likes women. (*No Shame . . . Part 3 33-37*)

She makes it clear that she has identified as a boy since she was young but she does not deny her femaleness. Her femaleness does not obstruct her embodiment of outer boyness. Interestingly enough, D’Lo makes a distinction between being a girl as a conformist feminine gender practice and being a woman as who she is and what she takes pride in. She interprets girlishness as a set of imposed social norms on the female body. Conversely, she redefines womanness as independence, maturity, and wisdom, obliterating negative meanings of femaleness.

D’Lo’s reconfiguration of masculinity and femininity is tied to her efforts to present a nice and gentle masculinity, distinct from the typical abrasive and gruff manliness. In her poem, “DEMGENDERS: GEMDENDERS: GEMSENDERS: SEMGEDNERS [sic],” she meditates on the relationships of masculinity and misogyny.

I want to be the best man, by being the best woman.

God, please, let me be FREE. [. . .]

God help me, please.

For me to understand my role as a boy.

To be chivalrous and never a misogynist.

To be me in my woman love

in my man love. (2004 *No Shame . . . part 2*: 13-14)<sup>95</sup>

D’Lo seems to want to channel her womanness, not as an externalized gender display but as an internalized special quality such as caring, sensitivity, emotional responsiveness, and empathy through the form of her boyishness or masculinity. Also, her boi identification embraces her inner androgyny. Wearing baggy jeans, layered T-shirts, and combat boots – all elements of hip-hop fashion – and with her head shaved, she is frequently mistaken in the street for a boy or man. However, it seems to me that the attire just covers womanness inside her, and her kind and nice masculinity is connected to her own womanness and love for women. This combination certainly affects her performance of masculinity on stage; she urges a self-reflective (male) masculinity divorced from misogyny and sexism in male impersonation in *Ramble-Ations*.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to her own configuration of female masculinity, D’Lo calls attention to the vulnerability and danger of being a boi in gender-policing society, through a femme’s observation of a female boi.

People’s stares, whether malicious or curious content.

That [sic] comments hurt her more deeply than when she has to physically defend herself. Always unsure of who is a friend or foe. [. . .] I thought

---

<sup>95</sup> For all my quotation of performance poetry and spoken word from *No Shame . . . Part 1, 2, and 3*, my transcription and punctuation follow what it is in the books.

<sup>96</sup> I will parse it out more in detail in my analysis of *Ramble-Ations*, later.

carrying a knife was just a part of being a boy. (D’Lo 2004)<sup>97</sup>

This monologue demonstrates how female born genderqueers live hard lives and are exposed to danger and violence for their gender deviance.

Offering her personal anecdote, D’Lo delineates her frustration with a man’s insult in London in the poem “BOY.”

And folks looked at me with her,  
some did double-takes. [. . .]  
Some glared if I be a man or woman, [. . .]  
he triple took, [. . .]  
yelled “GET A MAN.” [. . .]  
And it wasn’t like he hit me with a bat,  
But sometimes encounters like that  
Do just as much damage... [. . .]  
Ears ringing,  
“GET A MAN” “GET A MAN” “GET A MAN” (2004 *No Shame* . . .  
*Part I*: 20-21)

The male stranger’s yelling “Get a man” stigmatizes a female genderqueer as a “pseudo male,” not legitimizing female masculinity. It reveals homophobic abhorrence of love between women, authorizing heteronormativity. Like in this poem, masculine lesbians are frequently exposed to people’s staring eyes and double/triple takes because of their abnormal gender display (female masculinity) that confirms their deviant sexuality

---

<sup>97</sup> Liza’s monologue, “MY HE” in *BMB*. In this monologue, “she” indicates the masculine character J.C. that D’Lo plays. “I,” Liza is an Asian femme character.

(lesbianism).

Responding to the gender policing and the homophobic harassment, D'Lo twists the heteronormative disrespect to hold butch emotion.

I swallowed hard to push back the unexpected tears.

“Don't let her see you cry, D.

BE A MAN. (?).....(?) [. . .]

Don't let her see her boy cry. Swallow.” [. . .]

“C'Mon, [. . .] be a big boy,

you're a big boy ...” (*No Shame . . . Part I 22*)

Instead of “getting” a man, D'Lo strives to “be” a man or big boy in order to control her emotional turmoil and to reconfigure her masculinity, instead of renouncing it.

“Swallowing her tears” resonates with the emotional untouchability of the butch.

However, as Ann Cvetkovich asserts in her book, *An Archive of Feelings*, the emotional restraint of the butch should be considered attempts to keep emotional vulnerability under control in handling the harsh social reality that most butches face in everyday life.

Cvetkovich writes,

Emotional untouchability can be the public side of sexual untouchability when the butch lesbian's (female) masculinity depends on and is defined by her refusal to be made emotionally vulnerable or display feeling publicly or openly. This form of (emotional) untouchability plays an extremely important role in butch responses to homophobia and harassment. [. . .] Public vulnerability was a threat to a butch's dignity and

safety. [. . .] Untouchability can thus be a public performance presented both to a homophobic, straight culture, and within lesbian culture. (67-68)

D’Lo “feels” pain and sorrow but does not show her tears to the woman next to her and does not feel safe to display her feelings publicly. Therefore, emotional untouchability does not mean numbness or inability to feel. In the words of Cvetkovich, a butch’s emotional expression is a performance that is “done alone with no audience” (69). D’Lo needs to wear a thick armor to protect her vulnerable heart, but when she takes it off late at night at home, she can cry alone.<sup>98</sup>

However, D’Lo deals with her difficulties in living as a boi through spiritual compassion and transforms them into the sources that fortify her existence and make her keep going.

Lord, let him come back and say it one more time,

IMO PUNCH HIM.

Non-violence.

Dislike confrontation.

He will get his. KARMA. [. . .]

Relaxing while reminding myself that

I, too, have a hard time with everyday living,

so the bigger challenge is to be bigger

---

<sup>98</sup> Although Cvetkovich focuses on the stone butch’s sexual and emotional untouchability, I think that her discussion can be applied to the butch in general. A “stone butch” refers to a butch lesbian who does not want her body to be touched by a sexual partner. Yet I find that many non-stone butches also feel insecure in displaying their emotions, beyond their racial and ethnic differences, which, I think, relates to their vulnerable reality in heterosexist and gender-policing society. D’Lo does not identify as a stone butch, but she shares the public vulnerability of the butch emotion with other butches.

and never let the weight of this world  
affect how I am with the world  
or with her. (*No Shame . . . Part 1* 21, 23)

Instead of fighting with the male stranger and revenging an insult, she refrains, believing that his bad behavior would earn him bad karma.<sup>99</sup> D’Lo does not let herself be discouraged and nor does she surrender to the hostile social climate. Later on in the monologue, as she confronts more challenges, she is positively convinced that the hardships she experiences will feed her spiritual growth. In her play *BMB*, the character Nic says, “When you’re constantly being judged or looked at weird, it forces you to have an open mind, makes you more compassionate and understanding.” D’Lo converts the high costs of being a boi into her blessing to learn more flexibility and generosity in order to accept the deeper differences among human beings. This hopeful introspection corresponds to her multicultural inclusiveness and critical humanism throughout her work. D’Lo’s inclusive multiculturalism and critical humanism manifest through the themes and political messages delivered via her spoken word, the words of characters in her theatre pieces, the ways that she interacts with audiences in performance, and through her embodiments of the play’s themes and messages.

D’Lo’s multicultural rendition of a hip-hop aesthetic is a foundational component in the constitution of her own masculinity and performance work. D’Lo represents a hybrid subjectivity that black culture and Sri Lankan Hindu spirituality simultaneously inhabit. She claims, “Gay Hindu Hip-Hop [sic] – These 3 things that make me but don’t

---

<sup>99</sup> D’Lo spiritual understanding and belief in nonviolence echoes her characterization of an avatar of Gandhi in the piece, “Gandhi G: Nonviolence” in *Ramble-Ations*.

allow for one another” (D’Lo 2006 *Program Note*).<sup>100</sup> This statement encapsulates her background, politics, and her artwork. She grew up with Mexicans and Filipinos in a predominately-white area in L.A., listening to hip hop music. D’Lo says, “Hip-Hop became my way of expressing what I felt inside. I grew up with it. This was our music, the music of the second-generation immigrant. I was politicized to some degree. A black hip-hop group, Public Enemy, became inspiration. I want to speak for the people who don’t have a voice” (Bhumika K). As an Asian-American, D’Lo’s cross racial/cultural identification with black hip-hop music points to the multicultural fusion-nature of hip-hop music, deconstructing the essentialized notions of race (blackness) and cultural authenticity. However, her cross-racial identification is distinct from a superficial appropriation of black culture as cultural exploitation. D’Lo’s multiculturalism is differentiated from “eating the other,” in the words of bell hooks, a fetishization of blackness (qtd. in Johnson 2003: 4). Calling into question a black-nationalist approach to rap music, Gregory Stephens emphasizes that rap music is originally a hybrid form by blacks and non-blacks, and that specifically, in the postmodern era, it ironically defines racial boundaries and at the same time, transgresses them (63). He suggests that rap music is conducive to developing “imagined communities that transcend racial and national boundaries” (62). Similarly, Tricia Rose also indicates that for youth of color, hip-hop functions as a “cross-cultural communication network” in the given limited social space (84). Being faced with limited social resources, people of color can speak out their voices for self-representation

---

<sup>100</sup> The program note for the production of *Ramble-Ations* in Austin is unpaginated.

and share their experiences of white racism through hip-hop. Although D'Lo is not African-American, she embodies hip-hop as a medium through which to express her inner voices. She proclaims it "our" music, crossing racial and ethnic borders. Social messages and the politics of black hip-hop music can be shared with non-black racial minorities, as resistance to white racism and aspiration for social justice.

Stuart Hall's redefinition of diaspora in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" offers a useful insight to consider D'Lo's cultural identity formation through hip-hop. He notes,

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (2003: 244)

As he articulates, if diaspora is constructed in hybridity, D'Lo's Asian American diasporic experiences need not only be grounded within the presupposed sameness of Asianness or Sri Lankanness. Asian-American diaspora can be put into conversation with and can resonate with African-American diaspora through hip-hop as an inclusive cultural form. D'Lo's hybrid acculturation brings forth the "impurity and inauthenticity" of diaspora and undermines "the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of nationalist projects" (Gopinath 7). In understanding South Asian diaspora, South Asian nationalists tend to presume essentialized authenticity based on the inherent sameness of race or ethnicity, eliminating other social factors that frame diasporic experiences. However, D'Lo's diasporic experiences are constructed by her strategic,

situational positioning in a specific geographical location (Lancaster and L.A.) and affiliated cultural community (gay hip-hop), which reveals the diversity and heterogeneity of Asian-American diaspora.

D’Lo conceives her hip-hop enactment more clearly in connection with Sri Lankan-American diaspora in her short story, “Part 3. Sri Lankan Boi” from “OBESERVATION: Age 23.”

Maybe being raised in a strict Hindu household allowed for Hip-Hop to present itself as the ultimate escape and solution. Maybe I wanted to represent the island in the desert like how black folk painted their pride on hip-hop’s canvas. [. . .] though I grew up in the desert, I got island life flowing in my blood, how could I not make waves? (*No Shame . . . Part 3* 36)

Whereas hip-hop gives her an exit to free herself from her conservative Sri-Lankan immigrant community, it also is a new language to conjure up where she came from, the island (Sri Lanka), and a vessel to hold her Hindu spirituality in the desert (Palmdale, CA).<sup>101</sup> That is why Hindu and hip-hop are not separate and incompatible for her and how they sustain her contradictory in-between subjectivity of “not here (America) nor there (Sri Lanka)” (*No Shame . . . Part 3* 33). Hip-hop offers D’Lo a medium to map out her Sri Lankan-American diasporic experiences and a form to represent her

---

<sup>101</sup> Palmdale is D’Lo’s childhood hometown. Recollecting her childhood in Sri Lankan immigration community, D’Lo writes that she would clap in a 4/4 hip-hop beat, singing and making dance moves on the floor, with other kids in every Friday Bhajan (Hindu devotional singing) at a different Sri Lankan family’s house. She adds, “It [singing and dancing in Friday Bhajan] was all about hip-hop for me” (*No Shame . . . Part 3* 35).

multicultural identity.<sup>102</sup>

D’Lo’s hybrid hip-hop/Hindu aesthetic is deeply reflected in her performance work and through the warm and inclusive atmosphere that she creates in her performance. She writes:

Art is the most effective means to get a political or social message across to masses of people. [. . .] My cross cultural background is expressed through the Hindu traditions hailing from Sri Lanka AND [sic] Hip-Hop. [. . .] I am committed to combining and drawing parallels between both my Sri Lankan heritage and the other parts that have made me – from gender to hip-hop to spirituality and of course, acting a fool. (*Program Note*)<sup>103</sup>

Hindu spirituality, homo-hop (gay hip-hop), and comedy constitute the signatures of her performance in an inviting and intimate atmosphere. This in turn permits her to engage and interact more with audiences so that she can convey her political message through performance. In terms of efficacy, her universal appeal, despite very particular subjects, stems from the compassion and generosity that her soulful presence brings, in addition to her theatrical versatility and artistry.<sup>104</sup> As suggested by her statement that “true

---

<sup>102</sup> D’Lo enacts a hip-hop performance style for her spoken word, taking advantage of the spirit of freedom and resistance of hip-hop and relying on the virtue of interactions with audiences. Further, her embodiment of hip-hop fashion and trappings of blackness help her forge a viable South Asian female masculinity and produces vantage points to foreground racial performativity through her racial ambiguity. I will discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter in my analysis of her spoken word pieces – “Intro” and “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz” in *Ramble-Ations*.

<sup>103</sup> Here, it seems that “acting a fool” means broadly entertaining audiences such as doing stupid comedy and making them laugh in order to break the ice, which is indicative of how she draws the audience in through comedy.

<sup>104</sup> D’Lo’s spoken word piece, “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz,” in *Ramble-Ations*, beautifully exemplifies how a performer who is an old soul can connect audiences and make them unite in passion for freedom through hip-hop.

revolutionaries are the ones who are nicest,” D’Lo rehearses revolutions on stage by filling the stage with her good heart and spiritual maturity. Her presence shows her open mind and bright and life-giving energy. Audiences can experience how warm and nice she is in the ways she talks and relates to audiences. When she performs her serious spoken word pieces, she fully embodies her faith in social justice and her political messages.

D’Lo privileges the power of humor to involve audiences in her performance for social change. She says, “People don’t like to be preached to. They like entertainment. To me, comedy and hip-hop are serious. The minute I make people laugh, they knock down walls and open up to listen” (Bhumika K). For most performances, D’Lo starts off her show with making jokes and doing body-tricks, and all her characters are comic in a way.<sup>105</sup> Taking advantage of comedy, she leads audiences to identify with the characters with affinity and empathy. She concentrates on character-driven stories; as a result, her complicated subject matter is rendered more accessible to audiences. For instance, the monologue “Gandhi G: Nonviolence” in *Ramble-Ations* addresses serious domestic violence in a Sri Lankan family. However, by balancing the story with the comic character of Gandhi G, D’Lo effectively delivers her political claim of nonviolence, not overwhelming the audience. She writes, “I have come to value the way comedy resonates in everyone – the second universal language. [ . . . ] [i]t is through comedy that I try and relay that one fact: we all are so different, yet

---

<sup>105</sup> “Body-tricks” means a kind of doing magic with her body. For instance, sometimes, after she gets her arm drawn in her short sleeve, she extends her arm, giving the affect of growth. To warm up audiences and to get closer to audiences by making them laugh, D’Lo makes funny faces, moves her eyebrows and ears, and flips her tongue.

not ...” (*Program Note*).<sup>106</sup> D’Lo connects audiences to each other and to the characters through laughter, resting on the commonality of human beings beyond gender, class, racial, and sexual differences and gaps. In terms of performance strategy, employing comedy seems to be an effective and wise choice to engage with audiences through the self-representation of a marginalized, “particular” subject: a masculine/Sri Lankan-American/gay woman.

*Ramble-Ations: A One [sic] D’Lo’s Show*, a work in progress, was performed at ALLGO’s Tillery Theatre (Austin) on January 28, 2006.<sup>107</sup> D’Lo performs as herself in street clothes for what I will refer to as “spoken word pieces”: “Intro,” “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz,” and “Basic Human Politics,” and plays a character in stage costume and make-up for what I will call “theatrical monologues”: “Gay,” “Eulogy,” “Straight Guy: Women 101,” and “Gandhi G: Nonviolence.” “Gay” is a monologue in which D’Lo’s Sri Lankan mother (dressed in a sari) talks about her gay child, D’Lo. “Eulogy” is a mourning address for a female friend who died in the tsunami disaster; it is delivered by the character Vanathi, an upper-class ultra feminine Sri Lankan-American woman. To focus on D’Lo’s performance of racial ambiguity and masculinity, I do not include “Gay” and “Eulogy” in my discussion. Also, since I can adequately examine her multicultural hip-hop aesthetic with respect to her background and embodiment of blackness through the “Intro” and “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz,” I leave out an analysis of the last spoken word piece “Basic Human Politics.” Instead, I minutely review her male impersonation in

---

<sup>106</sup> D’Lo stresses how important comedy is to her work: “Tonight, my main goal is to keep you as far away from your everyday stresses as possible. [. . .] I will work hard to keep you entertained!” (*Program Note*).

<sup>107</sup> I am very grateful to D’Lo for giving me the unpublished script of *Ramble-Ations*.

“Women 101” and “Nonviolence,” in which D’Lo portrays a straight guy and a Gandhi avatar, respectively.

For her performance of *Ramble-Ations*, D’Lo uses a regular proscenium stage setting of the Tillery Theatre. Facing the platform stage, the audience seats are placed in a row, and the stage consists only of a drawn black curtain over the wall without any sets or props. D’Lo opens her show as an MC, casually appearing on stage wearing baggy blue jeans, a loose red check-patterned blue shirt, white combat boots, silver earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. Her outfit is almost the same as her quotidian appearance. Without any theatrical costume, D’Lo starts the show with her own off stage persona. On the night I saw the show, there was a technical problem at the beginning; D’Lo covered by walking out on the stage, saying “That’s all right, that’s all right. How’s everybody doing? We’ve already had a technical problem, but that’s OK. It will happen better now and later!” She relaxes herself and the distracted audiences with this warm and positive opening statement. D’Lo continues, making light dance movements, “I love women!” She shouts, “Everybody loves women?” raising her fist and making a gesture that attests she is listening for the audience’s response by putting her right hand around her ear. Right after the audience enthusiastically applauds and shouts “Yeah!” she asks them, “Everybody’s a butch, stud, boi, and somewhere in that long line?” and waits until some audiences respond to her with screaming. At this point, she asks, again “How many are all the other ones? Femmes’n stuff?” By addressing audiences and having conversations with them, D’Lo builds a commonality (love for women) between her and the audience in an intimate atmosphere, and automatically reclaims the theatre as a lesbian/queer place.

By beginning the performance with calling out the butches, D’Lo immediately bonds with the butches and bois.<sup>108</sup> In the play *BMB*, the character Nic laments, “Sometimes I wonder why butches be grilling one another in the club. [. . .] Why would you already wanna be enemies with folks who look like you, act like you, go through the same shit you go through on the daily?”<sup>109</sup> Halberstam suggests that butches share experiences of their “awkward non-belonging” in terms of gender transgression, and that butch subjectivity should be accounted for within a “narrative of community” because they partake “a common language spoken and exchanged” between them through passing on and learning (1998: 65). D’Lo prizes identification and support between butches or bois, always openly expresses her affection for the butch or boi in her performance, and discourages the pervasive competition and tension between butches.

D’Lo’s statement of love for women in a hip-hop style illustrates how a female gay hip-hop artist counters the misogyny infused in mainstream hip-hop. Many critics are concerned with “the sexist sentiment” of rap music in that many male hip-hop musicians refer to women as “skeezers,” “bitches,” and “ho’s” through the sexual objectification of them for male pleasure (Dyson 11). However, D’Lo enacts hip-hop as a medium to affirm and share her love for women and queers. In so doing, she undercuts the charges against hip-hop music of misogyny and homophobia that sometimes perpetuate a racist prejudice, and she excavates a possibility to articulate her subjectivity as a gay woman of color.

---

<sup>108</sup> The back of D’Lo’s books *No Shame . . . Part 1, 2, and 3* says “Thanks for getting’ this . . . Holla Atcha Boi!” and she dedicates the poem “BOY” to bois by writing “to my Boys [sic] who are perfect gentlemen, but women all the same – in strength, sensitivity, glory and emotion . . .” (*No Shame . . . Part 1* 19).

<sup>109</sup> The monologue, “SOMETIMES MAYBE” in *BMB*.

D’Lo’s embodiment and performance of hip-hop masculinity enables her to challenge the heteronormative exclusion of queer South Asian women in mainstream South Asian diasporic discourses. Speculating on queer South Asian diaspora in *Impossible Desires*, Gopinath identifies the “impossibility” of the queer South Asian female subject in heteropatriarchal ideology:

Given the illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative female subject within patriarchal and heterosexual configurations of both nation and diaspora, [. . .] Within patriarchal diasporic and nationalist logic, the “lesbian” can only exist outside the “home” as household, community, and nation of origin, whereas the “woman” can only exist within it. (16, 18)

Within the male dominant and nationalist imagination of diaspora, queer female subjectivity is destined to be erased and illegible. The heterosexist and nationalist understanding of South Asian-American diaspora privileges heterosexual male subjectivity and reinforces traditional gender-relations between men and women, concealing gender contradictions and resorting to racial solidarity. In this project, D’Lo should be embodying “pure and chaste, soft-spoken and coy femininity” in favor of the nostalgic idea of “home” (Chatterjee 449).<sup>110</sup> Yet I would argue that the spirit and “free-expression” of hip-hop provides her with a vehicle to substantiate the free gender expression of South Asian women. D’Lo transforms the impossibility and

---

<sup>110</sup> According to the dominant configuration of South Asian diaspora, women are forced to preserve conservative tradition and to guard the purity of “homeland” by conforming to traditional femininity in heteropatriarchal family.

unthinkability of a queer South Asian female subject position into, in the words of Judith Butler, a “permanent possibility of disrupting” within her hip-hop flavored performance (Chatterjee 452). By proclaiming, “I love women,” she combats her denied existence as a Sri Lankan-American boi/gay woman.

As such, D’Lo’s cross-cultural identification with hip-hop carries a multitude of meanings at the crossroads of gender, race, sexuality, and nationality. She pays cultural tribute to hip-hop and amplifies her masculinity by wearing blackness through hip-hop. Conversely, D’Lo critically intervenes into the hip-hop culture that is preoccupied by heterosexual African American men, and she rectifies misogyny and homophobia. She contributes to expanding hip-hop culture by carving a space to voice queer Sri Lankan-American women’s experiences. Moreover, hip-hop offers her an available masculine style and cultural form to defy the impossibility of queer South Asian female subjectivity.

After greeting and welcoming audiences, D’Lo starts performing “Intro,” a spoken word piece wherein she introduces herself as an artist and articulates the activism she carries out through art. She speaks in a rap style when she emphasizes some words and shifts her postures to a hip-hop rhythm, punctuated with hand gestures:<sup>111</sup>

I’m  
blessed like the rest  
but with a sense of my purpose [. . .]  
I told myself  
I’m all about

---

<sup>111</sup> Throughout her spoken word performance in “Intro” and “Ode to Hip Hop=Jazz,” D’Lo moves around the stage, taking a few steps, but mostly, she stands on the center stage.

working for the people

keeping my life full

She positions herself as a community artist who is committed to her own mission.

Although D’Lo is not tall or big, her presence and body strikingly occupy “the volume of space around the body” because her persona and posture exude confidence and strength, and she claims space with big movements, “unlike the circumscribed movement of most women” (Crowder 59). As she continues, she explains what she does and what she is struggling with. D’Lo asks, “What am I doing here?” and answers, “[s]ometimes striding or gliding/not minding the climate/changing on me.” Stretching her arms forward and outward, D’Lo stresses her words: “just eyes focusing/on what I must do/ WE got work to do.”<sup>112</sup>

Hearing D’Lo, the audience comes to be reminded of their difficulties and challenges and to think of “what they got work to do”; in this way, D’Lo’s performance can refresh the audience’s wills. She encourages the audience to keep their faith and to focus on their own struggles under any circumstance through her story.

never paying much attention to the tension that surrounds me

the stuff that tries to blind me

we keep climbing

situations are trying

Then, as if she is faced with more obstacles and difficulties, her voice becomes loud, strong, and desperate, almost like a growling song:

---

<sup>112</sup> I capitalize the entirety of the words that she emphasizes in her performance.

frying in the brain not in vain but insane  
situations get in the way  
but still the road is paved,  
mirrors seem concave  
perceptions of fake realities

As she smiles, the substance and tone of her spoken word text change. D'Lo rejoices in her vocation and connects her spirituality to art.

but at the end of the day,  
pay mind to what you may  
the goddess blessed D'Lo with  
Shit to say

D'Lo appreciates community artists' wisdom and achievement and values her collaboration and solidarity with them by saying "for all these years/been fine tuning NOT just my ears." At the performance I attended, she straightened her body and as an honoring gesture, raised her left palm to indicate Sharon Bridgforth who was taking care of entrance during the performance:<sup>113</sup>

to our mentors  
so we could vent or  
realize through someone ELSE's eyes  
who's older with bolder golden words to share

---

<sup>113</sup> Sharon Bridgforth is a playwright/novelist, director, and a community activist who resides in Austin. She works for ALLGO and in The Austin Project—"a collaborative venture among women of color artists, scholars and activists and their allies" (from professor Omi Jones's description of The Austin Project on the department website of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin, <[http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty\\_and\\_Staff/faculty/jones.cfm](http://www.finearts.utexas.edu/tad/people/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty/jones.cfm)>).

who cares who dares for us to be different  
relevant to the times of this experience

To end her intro-spoken word, D’Lo expresses her vision and passion as a community artist in her smile.

the past resistance  
of community artists . . .  
this piece is about basic human politics  
cuz the true revolutionaries are the ones who are NICEST  
humility with sacrifices  
I’m POURING out my heart so you might just  
See where we ALL might be able to UNITE us  
tapping into each one of our OWN experience [sic]  
so let me just shut the fuck up and let me incite shit

She turns her back toward the audience, and signals “peace-out,” making a V with her fingers. To be a true revolutionary, D’Lo warmly invites audiences to “critical generosity” and “intersubjective illumination” for humane communion through her performance.<sup>114</sup> She reconfirms how art contributes to building a bridge among different people and evoking humanity in recognition of diversity and differences as learning resources. By performing as herself in this opening spoken word, D’Lo effectively delivers her genuineness and truthfulness as a community artist and activist.

After the piece “Intro,” D’Lo performs another spoken word piece, “Ode to Hip-

---

<sup>114</sup> “Critical generosity” is coined by theatre scholar David Roman, and “intersubjective illumination” is borrowed from anthropologist Victor Turner (Dolan 2001: 469, 473).

Hop= Jazz,” which extols freedom through an homage to jazz musicians. Before she starts, she recollects her experience of collaborating work with political artists in NYC when she was younger. The piece is dedicated to jazz musician Horace Tapscott who played the piano in the back of a truck during “Art Speaks,” an event against police brutality. After he passed away, D’Lo visited NYC again and had a chance to watch Tapscott’s best friend, Randy Weston, play the piano. Inspired by Weston’s music in the club, she wrote the piece “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz.” Just as she admires community artists in the “Intro,” D’Lo continues to glorify her “mentors who’s older with bolder golden words” and finds her inspiration and vision in the communities of political art.

Her membership in the artistic community transcends racial, gender, and genre difference. A Sri Lankan-American woman who loves hip-hop, D’Lo feels at home in jazz by male black musicians. She says, “I love hip-hop.” and asks the audience, “How many love hip-hop?” raising her left fist high. As she goes on, she mentions, “And jazz! Improvisation and freeness. It’s all about splendid thing same to me.” Her love for hip-hop and jazz exemplifies a cultural tribute to black art and culture, and has influenced the formulation of her masculinity and her subsequent performance of it combined with blackness.

Through her hip-hop fashion/gestures and black vernacular in “Intro” and “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz,” D’Lo does not look like a South Asian and exudes a certain degree of blackness.<sup>115</sup> Although performing hip-hop always does not mark blackness and cannot

---

<sup>115</sup> Depending on individual audiences, D’Lo’s race can be variously read as black or black-Latino mixed or Caribbean. I will discuss her racial passing and ambiguity in depth later in my analysis of “Women 101,” a monologue delivered by a straight male character.

be equated with it, her shaved head, baggy clothing, dark skin, and her hip-hop movements evoke the embodiment of blackness. Despite her small body size, high voice, and her Asian female body, she is not emasculated. Rather, D’Lo’s masculinity is enhanced and heightened by employing hip-hop aesthetics. Since D’Lo performs as herself (with everyday off stage persona) in spoken word, I conjecture that hip-hop has played a key role in constructing and stylizing her masculinity in everyday life. In *of chicks, dicks, and chinks*, shorb plays an Asian hip-hop boy in the monologue of Norman, but s/he does not “embody” hip-hop styles and gestures. s/he performs a “character” that appropriates black hip-hop culture. However, D’Lo’s love for hip-hop has been embodied over time, which is essential to the formation of her cultural identity. Interestingly, bi-racial (Japanese-white mixed) shorb tends to be read as solely Asian, mono-racial Sri Lankan D’Lo tends to be read as racially ambiguous or mixed due to her enactment of black masculinity.

After building a common ground with the audience through love for hip-hop and jazz, D’Lo begins “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz”:<sup>116</sup>

To play music,  
you don’t have to see,  
I wanna sound like jazz,  
FREE like POETRY.

She reminds us that music is a universal language that everybody can feel and she equates poetry with jazz and freeness: “Like the silver rim shot/heard after skins are/

---

<sup>116</sup> D’Lo, *No Shame . . . Part 1*, 5-8. I capitalize the entirety of the words that she emphasizes in her performance. D’Lo performs this piece as herself in the same clothing that she wore in “Intro.”

Played on Afro Cuba.” Closing her eyes and feeling her imaginary rhythm and melody, D’Lo moves her fist and head and does scats: “kkung kking kking kkung, kkung kking kking kung ku kung ku ku.” While seeing her body, it feels like jazz music is playing or a live jazz band is playing. Indeed, it seems like she embodies jazz. To hear music, we do not have to see. I could imagine that a drum beat echoes through her torso, and her body is haunted by the soul of jazz.<sup>117</sup>

D’Lo’ explores the sensuality of jazz music through a saxophone’s sound, depicting playing a saxophone like sexual arousal between a saxophonist and the musical instrument. As she says, “Like the wetting of lips/or tongue touching palette/Before and after,” D’Lo closes her eyes and lowers her body, frowning as if she is concentrating hard, and sinks into the sound:

Sweet sweet sultry sounds  
of over sexed sax  
temp and flirt touch me  
tingling thru this torso  
Ears feeling sound,  
Penetration of mind  
Pounding heart with the beat<sup>118</sup>

As her voice becomes husky and indulgently guttural, it almost looks like the sensual

---

<sup>117</sup> D’Lo performs “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz” without any background jazz music. I was struck by her capability to conjure imaginary music only with her movements and words and to invite the audience to imagine jazz music.

<sup>118</sup> With the beginning of “sweet sweet sultry sounds” of saxophone, she praises the freeness of jazz, using the poetic metaphors of trombone, bass, guitar, and drum.

sound of a saxophone passes into her body and reverberates throughout it.

Then she calls attention to multicultural aspects of jazz in order to explain where the freeness and flexibility of jazz derive from. Closing her eyes, D’Lo keeps air drumming with her hands in tune with the rhythms sounding in her mind: “Like [a] drummer who mixes/worlds of Latin/worlds of Afro.” She looks up to the sky and spreads her arms very wide in the air as a worship gesture: “worlds of SPRIT y bata/via bongos y congas/Much like youth urban culture.” At this point, the mixture of Afro Cuban music, American black jazz, and Latin music highlight the hybridity that transgresses borders. With her last comment on “youth urban culture,” D’Lo makes an analogy between jazz and her own writing/performance art: that she acts as a cultural fuser, bringing cultures together.

However, D’Lo distinguishes a genuine jazz spirit from a commercialized appropriation of jazz. Shaking her head “No,” she ridicules this non-sense jazz:

Not cliché like poetry pizzazz  
that Love Jones SHIT  
that can trap words into  
Sing songy melodies  
of pure crap.  
Not a given of  
Mellow jazz club atmosphere  
Filled with folks that can’t FEEL  
NAH, like jazz  
free as can be

free like we ALL wanna be

Just as she juxtaposes poetry with jazz,<sup>119</sup> D’Lo parallels insubstantial romantic poems and luxurious, fancy jazz clubs for some upper-class people who pretend to understand jazz as a high cultural taste. Meanwhile, “*I wanna sound like jazz*” extends to “free like we all wanna be,” creating a new community with the audience.

D’Lo compares jazz to the inherent beauty of nature and represents the ritualistic aspect of music that transcends obstacles and sustains faith that change can be made.

And I wanna sound like jazz  
ALL over the place  
a less confined space  
of twinkling stars of rhythm  
of ocean waves of melody  
of bass clouds in motion  
and anticipating the rain  
as it never falls  
until handclaps break thunder

Stars, ocean waves, and clouds turn into musical metaphors for jazz. D’Lo underlines the strength of music (art) to create possibilities in an analogy between jazz and rites of prayers for rain. With closed eyes, she claps her hands together passionately and desperately. To me, D’Lo’s handclapping to pray for rain was reminiscent of the cultural history of blues and jazz that have survived and persevered through black

---

<sup>119</sup> I refer to her words, “*I wanna sound like jazz, free like poetry.*”

oppression. It seemed to me that the history and experiences of African-Americans and Asian-Americans crisscross on her body committed in the homage to jazz.

D’Lo ends “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz” with a fierce free-rap style that sounds like a frantically tempoed jazz improvisation. She makes light dance moves with her fists, reveling in freeness:

Jazz  
free like it  
free like we all wanna be  
I wanna be sounding like jazz  
I wanna sound like that.

As D’Lo repeats this refrain several times in emotional crescendo, her speech becomes more intense and picks up speed. In the middle of her speech, suddenly, she asks the audience to participate in her performance through “call-and-response,” a marker of hip-hop. D’Lo’s impromptu calling for audience participation aligns with jazz improvisation and the way in which in jazz, all the different musical instruments – piano, bass, drum, saxophone, trumpet, percussion, and guitar – converse with and layer on each other. The audience is invited as other players or instruments in the improvising jam session with D’Lo. D’Lo leads this interaction with the audience by asking them questions and their responses. She shouts, pointing her ear with her finger for a careful listening gesture:<sup>120</sup>

Do you wanna be FREE?

---

<sup>120</sup> D’Lo does not pick any individual audience member to ask questions and to interact with the audience in *Ramble-Ations*. She addresses the audience in general, directly looking at them.

Do you wanna be free?

free like jazz

I wanna be sounding like JAZZ

Do you wanna be free?

I wanna sound like THAT!

I wanna sound like JAZZ!

Whenever D’Lo asks, “Do you wanna be free?” the audience’s empathic response – “Yeah!” – follows. As she repeats the question and refrain, faster and faster, she elicits a more enthusiastic and louder response from the audience.

During the show, D’Lo keeps having a dialogue with the audience by asking questions and by responding in order to draw their attention and to interact with them, which is based on hip-hop aesthetics. According to Greg Dimitriadis, in live hip-hop, through the pronoun “you,” artists can form a “familiar and friendly relationship with the audience” (qtd. in Chatterjee 446). D’Lo’s repetitive question, “Do you wanna be free?” is a good example of how she incorporates the call-and-response of hip-hop into theatre/performance for audience participation. Relying on John F. Callahan’s and Thomas Luckmann’s ideas, Stephens notes:

Call-and-response, the Afrocentric dialogue paradigm, is a communication process ideally suited to multicultural settings. [. . .] ‘it is also especially well suited to the vernacular culture of an experimental democratic society.’ [. . .] call-and-response in a multicultural style; a form of reciprocity that features a ‘continuous alteration of feedback’ between speaker and audience. (78)

Call-and-response is a dialogical form that facilitates interactive, multicultural communication. In the written script of “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz” from *No Shame . . . Part 1*, there is no line of “Do you wanna be free?” It seems that D’Lo improvised this line during a live performance. As Stephens underscores, although call-and-response is rooted in Afro-American tradition, it can be adopted by non-blacks in order to share critical agendas and to talk about them “with” audiences. Through call-and-response, D’Lo successfully sets her multicultural performance on the common ground of humanity by rendering “wanna be free” as everyone’s collective longing. At the moment when the audience participates in creating the “we,” they all join D’Lo’s inclusive multicultural community.

I have discussed how D’Lo embodies a multicultural hip-hop aesthetic, performs hip-hop masculinity, and articulates her vision as a political community artist in her spoken word pieces: “Intro” and “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz.” In the following section, I will contextualize D’Lo’s writing process as a “truth-speaker” and engage with theories of racial passing and performativity in order to account for her performance of racial ambiguity and blackness. Then, I will analyze the theatrical monologues of two male characters – “Straight Guy: Women 101” and “Gandhi G: Non violence.”

Before I closely read D’Lo’s male impersonation-monologues in *Ramble-Ations*, it is necessary to discuss her writing process in relationship to her own statements about her art. As D’Lo introduces her show to the audience, she explains how she came up with the four characters in *Ramble-Ations*. She says, “All these characters are close to my life in some sort of a way, no matter how far they seem. I really do know people like this. My life is very interesting.” In a personal conversation with me, she has also

mentioned that she creates a character based on real people's experiences around her and her dialogues with them. D'Lo clarifies more about this in terms of "speaking truths" in an interview:

[A]s far as calling myself a "Truthspeaker," [. . .] I feel that everyone is a truth speaker of their own truths. It's the universal truth that is reflected through the artist's eyes . . . or maybe I'm biased. [. . .] I believe that my role as an artist is to break silences that have been surrounding us all our lives. [. . .] I think I speak the "TRUTH" about a whole lotta [sic] people's lives. This is just my little something to keep me going and to hopefully keep others going. (Venkat)

As a truth-speaker, she listens to the stories of different people and incorporates and translates them into theatrical pieces on stage. Hence, although all the characters are comic, D'Lo does not make fun of them and lets her characters use her mouth and body so that they tell their own truths. It is worth noting that although she performs the characters as a monologue, the characters take a dialogical speech-form that assumes audiences or listeners.<sup>121</sup> A truth-speaker aspires to be heard by true listeners so that truths can be shared.

D'Lo's perspective on the role of the artist as truth-speaker directly affects her writing of characters and working process. A straight man's monologue, "Women 101" was written from her actual experiences. D'Lo told me that many straight men used to ask her advice in order to deal with their own difficulties and troubles with their girl

---

<sup>121</sup> All monologues in *Ramble-Ations* consist of a casual conversation, mourning address, or lecture. The others to whom she speaks are represented by the audience for the performance.

friends. She gives good advice to them based on her lesbian relationship (as a boi who is assumed to be an expert on women). “Straight Guy: Women 101” is a straight guy’s lecture for other straight men where he teaches them to respect women. To perform “Women 101,” D’Lo appears on stage wearing a black suit with big shoulder pads, a white rounded neck T-shirt (without a neck-tie), a fake beard, and the white boots (her everyday shoes) that she has worn from the beginning of the show. Since the size of her jacket is big, and her straight stance, extending gestures, and assertive posture occupy a wide space, D’Lo looks far taller, bigger, and older in this character than she actually is. She looks like a middle-class black or mixed race intellectual man, but her white combat boots rupture the consistent class and generation status of the character, leaving a trace of her off stage hip-hop outlook. To go with her suit, I supposed that she would wear a gentleman’s formal shoes. In her e-mail correspondence with me, D’Lo said, “I wore those shoes because I didn’t have anything else to wear. [. . .] But, I liked it because it matched with the white undershirt I wore and it gave him some style.”<sup>122</sup> While her choice of the white combat boots was not deliberately intentional, it made a significant effect just beyond the style in the performance.

In the monologue of “Women 101,” D’Lo’s male impersonation, cultural display, and embodiment of blackness call her racial ambiguity to the foreground. With her dark skin, shaved head, lowered voice, and hyper-masculine posturing (straight stance, assertive and authoritative attitude, and serious facial expression), D’Lo’s masculinity is enhanced and marked as more black. Certainly, she displays racial ambiguity in the

---

<sup>122</sup> D’Lo’s e-mail to me on Aug 19, 2007

previous spoken word pieces – “Intro” and “Ode to Hip-Hop=Jazz” – and she is frequently misrecognized as a black man in her quotidian clothing in the streets. However, it seems to me that as she wears a “male” character and performs hyper-masculinity with the costume (suit) and make-up (beard), her adoption of black signifiers comes to the fore. As an audience member, it was hard for me to read her race (in the character) as Asian.<sup>123</sup> Related to this, when I asked if she played a black man on purpose, unexpectedly, D’Lo replied that she pictured a powerful, privileged white man when writing this character. Thus, it is evident that she did not intend to play or pass as a black man; such passing results in part from her daily embodiment of hip-hop and black culture. Applying Butler’s performative gender as “repetitive stylizations” to race, D’Lo’s passing reveals the performative nature of race. As Jana Evans Braziel points out, while masculinity is widely taken as performative, race still tends to be treated as a “resilient or impermeable given” and hence, as “stable, fixed, nonperformative” in critical studies of masculinity (168-169). D’Lo’s performative instantiations of a black masculinity through her Asian body brilliantly underscores racial performativity. Yet the fact that D’Lo is not read as white, unlike her intention, demonstrates that it is difficult for a performer of color to convincingly play a white character. Since dark skin or non-white skin is marked as striking, in terms of realness and credibility of performance, D’Lo’s desire to perform whiteness is not easily achieved. That is, D’Lo destabilizes the essentialist notions of race as innate and fixed, but at the same time, her

---

<sup>123</sup> As I already mentioned earlier, racial and ethnic reading of the character varies according to individual audience members. However, I believe that most audiences would largely agree that D’Lo’s Asianness is relatively diluted, and that she performs a multi-racial “Western” masculinity that evokes a certain kind of blackness in “Women 101.”

body is limited and conditioned by the dominant assumptions of race. Aside from her performance versatility, since she does not embody whiteness in everyday life, does not assimilate into whiteness because of her skin color, and uses black vernacular in “Women 101,” D’Lo’s characters are apt to be read as black.<sup>124</sup>

Arguing for partial or discontinuous passing, Sherrie A. Inness asserts that passing is not a static, monolithic experience but an open variation-process in which viewers intervene:

[S]ometimes it [passing] is a choice made partially or entirely by the viewers. [. . .] Thus passing is read differently by different viewers. [. . .] Because of their ambiguity, partial passers; make it clear that it is, at least partially, the spectators who make a pass feasible. [. . .] Spectators play an important role in “reading” the pass, and their interpretations are often beyond the control of the passing subject. (1997: 170-171 and 173)

The audience reads D’Lo’s race and ethnicity through available cultural codes and their own repository of racialization. D’Lo’s racial ambiguity in her male impersonation deconstructs a unitary, stable identity, but at the same time, hinges on the audience’s preconceptions of racial boundaries. Passing is composed of “the interaction and the negotiation of ‘self’ and the environment’s response to it inform and influence the process of passing” (Williams 62). Accordingly, D’Lo’s performance of racial/ethnic shifts operates within specific social contexts beyond her intention and motivation.

---

<sup>124</sup> Both most black and white people tend to presume that “talking ‘white’ is equivalent to speaking Standard English and talking ‘black’ is equivalent to speaking in the black vernacular” (Johnson *Appropriating Blackness* 5).

Although D’Lo did “not” intend to pass for black, her masculine Sri Lankan female body that embodies the trappings of blackness is subject to be read as black and ambiguous by some audiences.

The racialization of D’Lo depends on an individual audience’s recognition, categorization, and evaluation of visual cues and clues that the character presents (Moriel 171). The audience might variously interpret D’Lo’s “facial features, gestures, clothes, style, and body language; class and education c(l)ues, including speech and other aural signs” (Moriel 172). The audience’s racial marking of D’Lo implicates their own internalization of racial stereotypes and prejudices that are produced in the dominant representation system. She is racialized or passed, in the words of Teresa De Lauretis, within “the frame of vision and the conditions of representation” (qtd. in Inness 1997:173). Therefore, decoding D’Lo’s visual markers of race cannot transcend the historicity of representations of blacks and Asians in America.

D’Lo’s character highlights the trappings of blackness and inspires me to pose the question: “what constitutes blackness?” In *Appropriating Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson tackles an essentialized understanding of authentic blackness:

Because the concept of blackness has no essence, “black authenticity” is overdetermined – contingent on the historical, social, and political terms of its production. [. . .] The key here is to be cognizant of the arbitrariness of authenticity, the ways in which it carries with it the dangers of foreclosing the possibilities of cultural exchange and understanding. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. reminds us: “No human culture is inaccessible to

someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world.” (3)

To extend Johnson’s critical idea, blackness cannot be reduced to biological property and is not automatically derived from an inherent racial phenotype. If blackness as a cultural repertoire is a social construction that is exposed to multicultural exchange, it can be cultivated and embodied by non-black persons. Further, it suggests that beyond skin color, “performance of culturally inscribed language or dialect” becomes an essential part of blackness (*Appropriating Blackness* 4-5). D’Lo’s cross-racial embodiment denaturalizes race, shedding light on the constructed nature of it and constantly escaping from any fixation of her race and ethnicity.

Similarly, regarding blackness as a floating signifier, Stuart Hall critiques the exclusive binary of black and non-black culture. Recapitulating Paul Gilroy’s thought, he insists that in the either/or binary, the “or” should be replaced with the potentiality or possibility of an “and” because the “or” is in constant contestation (1997: 130). The opposed dichotomy of either/or eliminates the possibility of cultural dialogues in hybrid forms and precludes new understanding of racial and cultural differences. D’Lo’s Sri Lankan body, which performs a cross-racial fusion between “black” and “Asian,” ruptures the either/or binary and facilitates an alternative diasporic subjectivity. She explores the site of an “and” through cross-racial presentation with accompanying passing effects. To borrow from Liora Moriel, D’Lo’s journey is a “spectrum of passing” between the identity of origin (A) and the identity of transgression (non-A), melting them into a particular identity X (177). The incongruence between her original race/ethnicity and the expected cultural embodiment of it provides “fertile ground on

which to formulate new epistemologies of self and Other [sic]" (Johnson *Appropriating Blackness* 6). Also, this dissonance coalesces with the disjuncture between her female body and male impersonation (masculinity). As she crosses gender binaries, she also traverses a racial boundary.

However, D'Lo's vantage of passing or cross-racial performance should be taken into account in terms of South Asians' invisibility in dominant racial schemes of the United States. In "Not Asian, Black, or White?" Nazil Kibria writes:

Those persons who lack a clear "race" because they are not easily placed into available racial categories [. . .] run the risk of being ignored, of being invisible due to their inability to fit into established racial schemes. [. . .] There is, however considerable confusion about the exact race of South Asians. [. . .] For lack of a more elegant term, South Asians are ambiguous nonwhites. [. . .] In the United States, the established racial categories that are popularly used, in every social encounters, to classify non-whites include Asian ("Oriental"), Black, American Indian, and Hispanic. (249)

South Asians are neither black nor white, and they do not fit neatly into an (East) Asian (so called "yellow") category because of their darker skin color. As ambiguous nonwhites, South Asians are likely to be illegible within the widely held racial categories. As a result, since there is no given reference to discern racial differences within Asians, South Asians are frequently confused with other non-Asian people of color. Or they are conflated with Indians without regard to diverse national and ethnic differences within South Asia. If she does not look like an East Asian, her race becomes unclear. Kibria indicates that South Asians' legitimacy of Asian-Americanness is suspected even within

Asian American academic and political circles due to racial differences between South Asian Americans and other Asian Americans (252). In her own experience, D'Lo says, "We get easily mistaken for Ethiopians, and sometimes Filipinos" (*No Shame . . . part 3* 32), her South Asianness and more specifically, Sri Lankanness is destined to be erased and hence to remain ambiguous. By taking advantage of racial ambiguity, D'Lo destabilizes the notion of race as pure and mutually exclusive, but her racial ambiguity also testifies to the marginality of South Asians. D'Lo productively benefits from fluid performance of race, but this does not ameliorate her basic racial invisibility.

"Women 101" centers on a straight male teacher's introductory overview of the course, "Women 101," at the behest of The Lesbians for Peace and Justice.<sup>125</sup> The lesbian organization hired him to teach the class, and after his outlining of the course, he is about to have a Q & A session for male applicants who will take the class. This course purports to educate men by reminding them of their prejudice and ignorance about women so that they can reflect on male privilege and understand women's sensibility and sexuality. The straight instructor character stands in front of a music stand on which his lecture notes are placed. There is a standing mike in his right side. The audience can also see a flip chart titled "Women 101: Deconstructing the Myth" on a tall easel next to the instructor guy. As the stage lights come up, he adjusts the standing mike and music stand and he begins his introduction, locking his fingers under his belly. All of this conveys the seriousness and authority of the character; D'Lo lowers her voice, often

---

<sup>125</sup> In this monologue, according to the straight guy's explanation, straight male students who complete a ten-session course are granted their honorary lesbian status when they have their graduation ceremony. Through this hilarious set-up, D'Lo resignifies "being a lesbian" as a prestigious certification or honor.

frowning and maintaining an assertive and determined attitude.

However, the straight man's confidence and masculine charisma are not meant to signal misogyny. On the contrary, he is eager to teach respect for women and to redress patriarchal manhood. Since the character is performed by a female-bodied out gay woman, his feminist masculinity further alludes that "female" masculinity does not necessarily entail misogyny. He opens his introduction to the course with his personal experience. He confesses, "I was once like y'all. A straight dude who thought I was way too cool. Women were just another piece of ass." However, one day, when he found that his wife was with a lesbian lover, his arrogant ego collapsed immediately. As he says, "I heard she was dating a woman," the audience voices their surprise. He changes the tone of his voice tone and says, "All my friends tried to console me and tell me that she must've been gay all along." Audiences' laughter follows. His friend attempted to save his manhood predicated on sexual potency, which was in jeopardy, by insisting that his wife was a closeted, married lesbian. Paradoxically, this humorous comment illuminates that sexuality is fluid, and marital status does not tell someone's true sexual identity. Although D'Lo plays the straight male character, she does not seek to completely pass as a man. She sometimes breaks through the character by repetitively chuckling during the performance, which implicitly discloses her own persona.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> In the performance that I attended, D'Lo's giggles seemed to happen accidentally. If she were trying to present a consistent character, she would have needed to be serious and stoic. Instead of realistic acting, I believe she chose to do so to expose the gap between the character and the performer. She drew attention to the fact that the straight male character is performed by a gay woman, and she foregrounded that she enjoys sharing such a playful irony with the audience.

In dominant representations, lesbian women are frequently forced to compete with and emulate men to be with a (straight or bi-sexual) woman. In terms of the authenticity and credibility of masculinity, butch lesbian women's masculinity is disavowed as illegitimate or ersatz in comparison with genetic men's "natural" masculinity. However, D'Lo reverses the convention and evidences male heterosexuality's inadequacy and impotence, which frustrates sexist male ego and undercuts macho masculinity. The straight male character's lack of (hetero) sexual competency impairs his approved social power as a man. In male-dominant society, it is taken for granted that the penis is equated with sexual agency, and it sanctions masculinity. Accordingly, female masculinity is punished and ridiculed because of the lack of a "real" penis. In contrast, D'Lo depicts that lesbian sexuality without a real penis surpasses the straight guy's penis (heterosexuality). The symbol of male privilege and sexual potency is degraded as a sign of failure.

The straight guy goes on his anecdote, "I stalked her [his ex-wife]. [. . .] I was following them around at the HEB. [. . .] She was truly happy, content on the path she was on with her lesbian lover. [. . .] I ain't never seen that from her while she was with me." In wonder, he adds, "It looked and felt . . . magical," as if he is mesmerized by heavenly beauty or is witnessing an unbelievable sight. He realizes how fulfilling and sufficient his ex-wife's lesbian relationship is and thinks that he could not satisfy her, and was unable to offer her what her lesbian lover can give. Heteronormative discourses of lesbianism presuppose that lesbian relationships are a copy or imitation of heterosexuality as the real, the original, and the authentic norm (Butler 1991:20). Thus, it is believed that lesbian relationships are incomplete in and of themselves. However, D'Lo upsets

the hierarchical dichotomy between hetero and lesbian sexuality, demonstrating that the assumed copy can do things that the original cannot provide. It is clear to him that his ex-wife's lesbian relationship is truly original and wholesome. He finds that he (a straight man) needs to imitate lesbians.

D'Lo capitalizes on the playful gap between the character (a straight man) and the performer (a gay woman), which produces a great deal of humor in this piece. Since *Ramble-Ations* was a work in progress, she did not finish the complete version of "Women 101," and performed the piece without memorizing the whole speech lines. She read this monologue, looking at her script on the music stand and at the audience in turn. As the audience already knows that D'Lo is a (out gay) woman, they receive her performance of the character as virtuosic and pleasurable Brechtian acting. Her male impersonation "puts quotation marks" around the masculinity of the male character, which "punctuates parody and irony" (Solomon 171). Throughout this monologue, as the audience keeps laughing, D'Lo frequently giggles, and is forced to turn away from the audience toward the black stage-curtain behind her, touching the curtain and ad-libbing "nice material" to cover her laugh. The audience laughs even more when they notice her giggles. It seemed to me that this interaction does not interrupt and distract from the show, but generates more pleasure for the audience, as well as re-emphasizes the joyful ironies inherent in the performance's structure.

By infiltrating her off stage persona, D'Lo reveals more of the discrepancy between the character and the performer in the casual and intimate atmosphere that a work in progress allows. Along with that, she forgets to maintain her lowered voice, and in the middle of the monologue, her speech pattern tends to come closer to hip-hop-

flavored spoken word in black vernacular in her actual higher voice than the lower, measured speech of her character. This transition makes her daily persona more conspicuous and increases the rupture between the character and the performer.

Going back to the straight guy's monologue, he explains how his enlightenment was possible, and how he became an instructor for the class of Women 101. The straight man happened to meet "a very wise lesbian couple" in the woods while he spies on his ex-wife and her lover at the H.E.B. From the lesbian couple, he learned about why his wife left him and about what he did not know about women. He says, "Oh, my straight and clueless brothers, I am here to help you and I am here to teach you what I have learned." Finally, he informs the audience that he was involved in The Lesbian Alliance for Peace and Justice in order to teach straight men, as a prospective honorary lesbian. He stresses, "They say that it's more powerful for straight men to hear this from other straight men." Again, this line sounds ironic and comic because actually, he is a lesbian (per D'Lo's term, gay) in man's suit who plays as a straight man. Calling the audience "you," D'Lo addresses the lesbian and women audience as imaginary straight male students in Women 101 class.

After presenting his introduction to the course, the straight guy/instructor begins the first session by revealing the title of "What Women Want." He approaches the flip chart and turns over the title page (Women 101) of it. He shows the first session title "What Women Want," folding the rest of the page and holding it with his right hand so that he can cover the rest of the list. The man insists, "What women really want is not just love and respect (pause). They want ... you to get a job!" His second sentence is

the punch line. The instructor's lesson betrays an expected answer and subverts the dominant assumption that women are emotional, not realistic.

As the guy exposes the next title on the flip chart, the audience learns that the second session will deal with "Why They Don't Need You." This title itself is very hilarious because it undermines the *raison d'être* of heterosexuality and spotlights how men feel powerless by women's independence. He says, "They don't need you because you don't know how to love and to respect. They don't need you . . . Because you might not know how to get a job." The audience's laughter and applaud follow. In the repeated mention of men's "joblessness," I was reminded of the stereotype of black men and joblessness (Dasgupta and Dasgupta 332). Although the straight guy does not specify the race and class of his male students in this monologue, his embodiment in D'Lo's body, which passes as that of a black man's, conveys the possibility that the character is addressing working-class or poor black men, as a self-parody of black men.

The third session is titled: "Strength as Done by Women vs. Strength as Done by Men." Under this title, the straight guy urges men to realize how hard and burdensome being a mother and wife is. He announces that all members of the class are required not only to wear a pregnant suit, but must deal with a real life husband and two kids for two days. It means that to understand women, men need to experience caring for a husband and childbearing/rearing. By acting as a mother/wife, men can practice being caring and recognize that they have enjoyed their own prerogatives and conveniences at the expense of women's discomfort and hard labor. Moreover, the implication of the requirement is that by "being" a mother/wife, men will have to reflect on their perception

that women's work in the private sphere is worthless and trivial, and they will finally have to respect women's strength.

After he briefly touches on the 4<sup>th</sup> session "Intuition, Instinct and Telepathic Powers," the guy talks emphatically and at great length about session 5: "Emotion: As Done by Women, As Perceived by Men." He says:

This is the main problem.

When women are crying,

It does not mean necessarily that they are sad.

It means that you probably pissed them off.

Or they are so frustrated that you don't have a job.

He underlines that sometimes, women cry not because of sadness but because of resentment or anger, which causes miscommunication and misunderstanding between men and women. D'Lo points out ways in which men misread women's feelings, and she revisits supposed women's emotional weakness or sentimentalism. Relying on the assumption of women's shared experiences, D'Lo seems to imply that women can read other women's feelings and emotional expression better than straight men can. Of course, even women's and lesbians' sensitivity and ability to perceive other women's emotions vary in individuals. However, it is likely that D'Lo intimates that men and women are differently socialized in dealing with and expressing their emotion. Due to male privilege, in many cases, men do not need to care and read women's feelings in male-dominant society.

The guy continues, "Number 6: Quality, Time, and Chivalry . . . if you don't know why this is up here . . ." addressing the audience (imaginary straight men) with a

look of pity, he does not finish his sentence. As if this list is so natural to be indisputable, he suggests that if men do not get it, they are far behind or they are not qualified to love women.

The straight guy raises a fundamental question about women's sexuality with the 7<sup>th</sup> title. As soon as he shows the 7<sup>th</sup> session, "Bi: a Word to Describe All Women?" on the flip chart, the audience bursts into laughter. As the audience may have already experienced that the strict dichotomy between heterosexuality and lesbian sexuality does not work in reality, and that many women are sexually mutable, the 7<sup>th</sup> theme is amusingly resonant to them, and evokes lesbian desire. At this moment, D'Lo's staging highlights straight men's fear of women's bi-sexuality, which in return corresponds to lesbian pleasure in extended availability. Due to the audiences' constant laughter, D'Lo cannot hold her giggles. To try to conceal it, she intentionally covers her face and knits her brows by putting her left hand on the middle of her forehead. Coincidentally, this gesture resonates with the frustration and anguish of the male character. Right after this gesture, the guy holds up his head and says sadly, "I'm afraid so," responding to the title "Bi: a Word to Describe All Women?" D'Lo's comedy is made of straight men's tragedy. Addressing women's alleged bisexuality, she describes that it is the straight man, and not the lesbian, who is really insecure.

After the instructor continues, mentioning only the titles of session 8: "History's Role in Women's Insecurities" and session 9: "Impotence and Balding and Other Insecurities of Man" without any detailed explanation, he focuses on the last session: "The Importance of Oral Sex." Whereas the other titles on the list are written together, No.10 is singly written with big letters on its own page. With this visual sign, it is

obvious that the 10th session is the most important and primary week throughout Women 101. He informs the audience that to educate men effectively, the Lesbian Alliance for Peace and Justice strives to be non-threatening to them and he adds, “You know, we [men] have this issue. That is why they put oral sex last on the list.” Further, he specifies:

This idea combined with the fact that men think with their dicks allowed them to see how starting from the bottom and going up would be the best plan of action. So, we will start off with the Importance of Oral Sex, so that what you thought you were going to look forward to, is now the first thing on the agenda.

D’Lo connects penises and erections with men’s way of thinking and makes fun of the linear and goal-oriented epistemology of men. Hilariously, in addition to poking fun of men’s insecurity about women’s bisexuality (with the title 7), she again implies that men are more susceptible to threatened feelings, and it is for that reason that the instructor and lesbian organization had to initially conceal the provocative content of the course and start with mild topics. The assumption throughout this entire piece is that in contrast to men’s overall ignorance of women in the larger social context, lesbians (including the host lesbian organization and D’Lo herself as a playwright) are attentively and precisely aware of how men think and behave.

Championing the importance of oral sex, the instructor reaffirms the denigrated female genital as positive and precious, and encourages men to give oral sex for women. After the guy shows a big, pink and purple, hand-drawn picture of a vagina on the flipchart, he remarks, “We will refer to the Vagina as Glory,” adjusting his jacket with a

reverential gesture. He tries to listen to an imaginary male audience's question, holding up his palm to ask the audience to be quiet, and points to the imaginary questioner with his finger. Then, as if he cannot get it, he asks, "Yes, sir. What do you mean? What do you mean you don't want to?" To scold men's selfish demand for fellatio and their unwillingness to give cunnilingus, he responds:

She sucks your dick, right?

You like it, right?

So what's the problem in doing it for her?

Fifty to Fifty, man.

Further, he insists that fellatio is more disgusting for women because women might swallow men's smelly sperm during fellatio. Exemplifying his experience that he kissed his girlfriend right after her fellatio, he says, "Our shit tastes nasty." As such, instead of portraying contempt of women's genitals, D'Lo the playwright makes fun of men's genitals.

Finally, with a "golden note" about oral sex, D'Lo closes "Straight Guy: Women 101." Nodding his head with wide-open eyes as an emphasis, the instructor warns his male students, "If you still have a problem with eating punany, then just know that there's a lesbian out there who will." His undue seriousness leads to much applause mingled with the laughter of the audience because D'Lo, a gay woman, is willing to "eat punany," and she is performing the character that encourages men's oral sex for women. Interestingly, in the original play script, D'Lo writes, "eating pussy" instead of "punany." The website of [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) notes that the term "punany" is from the Indian Kama Sutra and is used to describe the female sex organ. This term also became

Jamaican/Caribbean slang to glorify the “sweet pussy.”<sup>127</sup> Considering that D’Lo tends to be mistaken for a Caribbean (or Caribbean-mixed), and that the character glorifies vaginas, it seems that her choice of the word “punany” was very appropriate. Along with the historical coincidence in relation to India and the Caribbean, using “punany” specifically marks her South-Asianness, and at the same time, resonates with her racial passing on stage.

In embodying blackness and negotiating the concomitant passing effects, D’Lo augments her masculinity. By doing so, she defies the emasculation of Asian masculinity in “Women 101.” She rebels against enforced femininity of South Asian women and manifests a viable female masculinity. South Asian women are compelled to conform to strict gender roles because South Asian men attempt to “ascertain their masculinity” by defining women as “passive, docile homebodies” so as to compensate for their own emasculation in contrast to Western masculinity (Dasgupta and Dasgupta 333). Thus, D’Lo’s presentation of black masculinity is more subversive in that she confronts domestic sexism and global racism and proposes queer South Asian female subjectivity in the absence of naturalized, constraining femininity.<sup>128</sup>

However, since race and gender are intertwined and they “reveal/conceal about each other” in terms of (in)visibility (Walker 878), D’Lo’s gender bending and racial passing leave limitations and contradictions. Whereas she gains enhanced masculinity,

---

<sup>127</sup> According to the website of [urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com), “Indian laborers were used to build roads in Jamaica and the Caribbean during the 1930s, 40s and 50s so a lot of Indian slang made its way into the Jamaican vernacular.” <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=punany>>.

<sup>128</sup> Although some South Asian heterosexual feminists claim and advocate South Asian feminist subjectivity, they do not challenge the institutionalized heterosexuality and do not question conforming gender practices.

not being trapped by effeminate Asian masculinity, she has to pay a cost for that by being exposed to the hostile racism that black people suffer. Her passing does not always promise her power and privilege in a white-racist world. Instead of rescuing her masculinity from Orientalism, she might experience a different manifestation of racism from what East Asians with lighter skin face. Since “heightened visibility (or readability)” of a black subject is the other side of the social invisibility of a black subject (Schlossberg 5), D’Lo’s body can be located in the “social” invisibility (racist discrimination and degradation) of black people. D’Lo’s enactment of black masculinity on the Asian (female) body counters the racist prejudice that Asian-American men are weak, delicate, fragile, compliant, subservient, and unassertive. However, as Johnson notes, the consequences of significations of blackness “vary materially, politically, socially, and culturally depending on the body on which it settles” (*Appropriating Blackness* 218). To reveal her female masculinity, D’Lo’s Asianness is subject to concealment.

D’Lo continues to take on self-reflective and feminist masculinity in another male impersonation piece, “Gandhi G: Non Violence.” “Gandhi G” is a monologue by a reincarnated avatar of the Indian spiritual leader and advocate of nonviolence, Mahatma Gandhi. If she performs black masculinity, playing with the trappings of blackness and her racial ambiguity in “Women 101,” “Gandhi G” foregrounds South Asian masculinity, borrowing the persona from the historical figure. Like “Women 101,” the characterization of Gandhi G is also closely related to D’Lo’s artistic identity as a truth-speaker. To address domestic violence against women, she created the character based on her father’s real story of a battered woman in his family by mixing her

autobiographical narrative with Gandhi's idea of "nonviolence."<sup>129</sup> Through the issue of domestic violence, D'Lo revisits Gandhi's politics of nonviolence and applies them as a means to criticize patriarchal masculinity.

It is incredibly significant and brilliant that D'Lo, a masculine Sri Lankan gay woman, impersonates Gandhi. Gandhi has been a controversial figure; whereas he is admired as the "Father of the Nation," many Hindu fundamentalists have blamed him for effeminizing Indian masculinity. Gandhi cautioned that "the identification of 'manliness' with violence was likely to lead humanity to destruction," and valued "women's quiet strength" (qtd. in Johnson "Gandhi's Soul Politics" 15). However, radical Hindu nationalists think that nonviolence is nothing but passivity or cowardice, and reinforces Western-centric (British colonialism) emasculation of Indian men. Also, many representations in popular culture in India frequently have grappled with Gandhi's "incorporation of the feminine" for "the recovery of national identity" (Gabriel 265, 297). Gandhi is a national hero, but his androgynous or feminine masculinity in both appearance and behavior remains unsatisfactory in re-imagining a viable post-colonial Indian masculinity. Besides, some feminists have criticized Gandhi's essentialized understanding of gender differences and his patriarchal treatment and oppression of his wife Kasturba (Johnson "Gandhi's Soul Politics" 10). As such, the significations of Gandhi embrace diverse social contradictions and are located in a fraught site of

---

<sup>129</sup> The audience cannot know that this Gandhi G's story is based on D'Lo's real family story because she does not mention that in the show. However, since they know that this character is created as a reincarnated Gandhi avatar, they are aware that it is not a real story of the historical figure, Mahatma Gandhi.

contestations among Hindu fundamentalist and nationalist movements, imperialist feminization, and feminism.

D’Lo’s impersonation of a Gandhi avatar is more important when we consider her ethnicity and gender together. As Indian-Americans are predominant in South-Asian American discourses and communities, Sri Lankan-Americans are underrepresented and marginalized. Gandhi achieved international recognition as an Indian spiritual leader and peace activist/thinker. Yet despite his many accomplishments that make him deserving of acclaim, Gandhi was a man, regardless of his androgyny. And men are still more likely to be recognized in the sphere of politics and valued as historical subjects. D’Lo replaces Gandhi of “man/India” with a queer avatar of “woman/Sri Lanka,” paving the way for an alternative representation of Sri Lankan-American gay women.

In terms of South Asian diaspora and the gendered dichotomy of the public and private sphere, her impersonation of Gandhi disrupts the gendered imagination of homeland. As Gopinath argues,

The “home” [. . .] is a sacrosanct space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, embodied by the figure of the “woman” who is enshrined at its center, and marked by patriarchal gender and sexual arrangements. [. . .] The gendered constructions of South Asian nationalism are reproduced in the diaspora through the figure of the “woman” as the boundary marker of ethnic/racial community in the “host” nation. The “woman” also bears the brunt of being the embodied signifier of the “past” of the diaspora, that is, homeland that is left behind and continuously evoked. (14, 18)

Women are emblematic of home/land and they are forced to maintain traditional values and moral purity in order to guard the boundary of a nationalist homeland. D’Lo as an avatar of Gandhi unseats the patriarchal nationalist dichotomy by reincarnating the male political/spiritual leader (the national subject) with the female body. In this way, she queerly redefines the heteronormative, male-dominant imagination of diaspora and liberates the female body within the domestic space from the reinscription of past and homeland.

Since D’Lo radically changes her movements and English accent in “Gandhi G: Nonviolence,” her performance in “Women 101” and “Gandhi G” demonstrates an extreme contrast of racialized masculinity and foregrounds racial performativity. As the stage light is on, the audience sees D’Lo sit in a chair, facing a small table. She plays this character sitting on the chair throughout the performance, using only hand gestures and small movements. D’Lo as Gandhi G wears a white tunic and puts on round-shaped glasses. Gandhi G holds a walking stick, carefully leans over the table, and tries to see the audience, making a wry face. Unlike D’Lo’s straight standing posture and extending gestures that occupy much space in “Women 101,” she sits, shrugging her shoulders and shrinks her body in “Gandhi G.” She intentionally uses a thick Indian-English accent to convey the realness of her Gandhi impersonation,<sup>130</sup> and her slow and low energy body movements make her look old, weak, and small. By changing her speech pattern and body position, along with the costume and props, she takes off her black masculinity and racial ambiguity and embodies an old, effeminate Indian

---

<sup>130</sup> This monologue is not a real story of Mahatma Gandhi, but since Gandhi G is a reincarnation of Mahatma Gandhi, D’Lo imitates the real Mahatma Gandhi to perform this fictional character.

masculinity to impersonate Gandhi.

The “Gandhi G” monologue consists of Gandhi G’s dialogic lecture on nonviolence. Gandhi G begins his lecture, telling the audience, “Can you hear me? Can you see me? [. . .] You are here to hear me. [. . .] I have a lot to tell you,” and in the meantime, he pulls out a plastic zipper bag from his tunic. As the audience watches, we learn that it is a bag filled with weed (ganja). The audience laughs. Immediately, he says, “That’s a good thing” putting his index finger on his lips to signal “Don’t tell. It’s a secret.” He adds, “You see, the great Mahatma, was a non-violent bastard. [. . .] Great Bastard, that guy.” Then he introduces himself, pointing to him with his thumb “I am a reborn, reincarnated avatar of Gandhi. [. . .] I was re-born first from a non-practicing Hindu to a practicing one.” The transformation into a practicing Hindu corresponds to D’Lo’s male impersonation (gender-crossing) and her gender-sensitive reinterpretation of nonviolence. Just as D’Lo is eager to practice Hindu spirituality and political activism through her performance, she emphasizes that this character is a politically aware and socially engaged Hindi. Also, in that she reinterprets the national leader’s politics from a feminist perspective by playing the male character with her queer female body, her gender-bending performance itself is subversive and political. Gandhi G continues, making a fist and looking up to the sky: “Because I feel his [Gandhi] life reflected such divine power, I have held him up as a God. If he is a God, then I am a God, too.” D’Lo insinuates that South Asian women can reach a stage of Godliness as well as being national leaders. In the monologue, although the Gandhi avatar is portrayed as a man, D’Lo’s performing female body makes a critical comment that femaleness does not

preclude women's sanctity and transcendence.<sup>131</sup>

D'Lo positions her Gandhi avatar as an international pioneer and change-maker, and subverts the Western hegemony over the East, commenting on white cultural appropriation/exploitation of Indian culture. Taking out some weed in the plastic bag and putting it in rolling paper, the Gandhi avatar says, "The Beatles came to India. They left with beads and hookahs and ganja. And changed the world from India." He adds, "So I am supposed to do the same, with a little help," lifting up the weed bag. Meanwhile, as his walking stick on the table slips, he says as an ad-lib, "I'd better put this down. Peacefully, Peacefully." The audience laughs at his witty and impromptu exemplification of nonviolence. D'Lo's Gandhi avatar is a humorous (female) God who smokes ganja and is capable of making a huge impact on the world as the Beatles did.

To discuss nonviolence, the Gandhi avatar begins his talk by criticizing the equation of passivity and nonviolence, rolling the ganja paper. He says, "I believe in peace. I believe in the power of non-violent actions. That doesn't mean that I believe in Passivity [sic]." After he briefly observes the audience's response, to make sure of it, he adds, shaking his head and frowning: "Ah, No, No, No, but [sic] the contrary, you bastards. I may be here sitting smoking on [sic] the ganja, but inside, my blood boils for the many who [sic] have been taken unjustly." As his speaking tone turns stronger in its resoluteness and vigor, it becomes clear that he is deeply frustrated by the pervasive misunderstanding of nonviolence. His eagerness to correct the misconception of

---

<sup>131</sup> As the character of Gandhi G, D'Lo does not divulge her femaleness in this monologue, but all the audience already knows that Gandhi G is performed by a woman, and that "she" (a masculine woman) is pretending to be a man.

nonviolence echoes the fact that his inner spiritual potency as a masculine power is likely to be overlooked by his effeminate appearance. Gandhi's androgynous gender display does not necessarily mean weakness and submission, much as his calm presentation does not imply passivity.

Mahatma Gandhi developed the concept "Satyagraha," which means "clinging to Divine Truth," in order to distinguish his strategy of nonviolence from "passive resistance." Satyagraha is variously translated as "nonviolence, truth force, love force, and soul force" (Johnson "Gandhi's Soul Politics" 6). It is important to note that Gandhi's discrimination between nonviolence and passivity was a critical response to British colonial emasculation of Indian men and to Indian macho Hindu fundamentalists. Gandhi emphasized, "Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice" (qtd. in Adler and Ling 465). D'Lo's Gandhi avatar reconfirms Gandhi's belief, and Mahatma Gandhi's "feminine" masculinity overlaps with D'Lo's "female" masculinity.

Although D'Lo seriously and convincingly plays a Gandhi avatar, at some points, she finds comic moments in the gap between the character (Gandhi G) and the performer (D'Lo), and in doing so, shakes up the consistency of the character and the audience's coherent identification. When D'Lo puts her tongue on the tobacco paper to seal it with spittle and holds the lighted ganja, she makes a gesture of handing it toward the audience just in case any audience member wants it. As the audience laughs, D'Lo tries to hold her laughter, hanging down her head and fanning her face with her left hand and says, "I have giggles." She keeps the voice of the character, but it could be either D'Lo or Gandhi G who has the giggles, or that for a brief moment, D'Lo and Gandhi G are

laughing with one another. This mirthful break gives the audience a glimpse of D'Lo's real persona.

Immediately, D'Lo changes the mood and gets back to the character to focus on her talks on nonviolence. The Gandhi avatar tells of his physical violence at the hands of his father and of his sexual violation by his male math teacher in order to meditate on the relationship between being a victim of violence and internalized violence. He states, "When I was married, I took out all my daily frustrations on my wife. But still, I didn't understand how violence was within me." This statement coincides with the fact that even Mahatma Gandhi as the founder of the nonviolence movement oppressed his wife, Kasturba in his earlier marriage life. Only once he realized that he was an oppressor to his wife could he reflect on violence within himself. Mahatma Gandhi recollected, "Her [Kasturba] determined resistance to my will on the one hand and her quite submission to my stupidity on the other hand, ultimately made me ashamed of myself. [ . . . ] In the end she became my teacher in nonviolence" (qtd. in Johnson "Gandhi's Soul Politics 9). Likewise, the Gandhi avatar's musing on violence in domestic space allows him to reconstruct his views on nonviolence and to be introspective.

Gandhi G tells a story about an old battered woman in his family to describe how he came to rethink nonviolence through self-reflection.<sup>132</sup> When he met with his family members, right before he came to America, his old aunt begged him not to leave, crying desperately. However, at the time, he did not know that she had been beaten senseless by her old husband for a long time, and why she was terrified of Gandhi avatar's

---

<sup>132</sup> Again, this story was modeled on D'Lo's father's actual experience in his family. I learned this from personal conversation with D'Lo, but the audience is never privy to this information.

departure. He finishes the story in deep grief, “She died soon after we arrived in the States. Of broken bones or of a broken heart, I do not know.” D’Lo inserts her family story into the monologue of a Gandhi avatar, and in doing so, she relocates (non)violence issues within the realm of the personal (domestic violence). The phrase, “Of broken bones or of a broken heart,” calls attention to women’s invisible and unnamed oppression as well as general “non-physical” violence.

Lisa Adler and L.H.M Ling contend in the article “Towards a Dissident-Feminist Reconstruction of Nonviolence” that since Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence mainly concerns physical conflicts between men, it “fails to address women-specific violence” in the private sphere (463). D’Lo’s reconfiguration of nonviolence is congruent with this feminist criticism of Gandhian nonviolence. As Adler and Ling articulates,

Women, in particular, suffer from an invisible violence that is also internalized, interconnected, and embedded. [. . .] The nonviolence advocates’ appeal to “love the enemy” presumes that most people do not love their enemies, and that the relationship between oppressed and oppressor remains free of conflicting emotions. [. . .] Indeed, women too readily love their “enemies,” thereby perpetuating their subordination.

(467-469)

Although Mahatma Gandhi confesses that he learned true Satyagraha (nonviolence or soul force) from his wife, Kasturba’s acceptance of his tyranny – “loving the enemy” – signals the danger of reproducing her subjugation. The Gandhi avatar’s old aunt also could not save her husband’s soullessness and stop his violence through her practice of “loving the enemy.”

D'Lo finds a cause of men's resort to violence in men's insecurity and incapability to deal with their emotion and suggests an alternative way to practice nonviolence in daily life. Gandhi G still holds a ganja butt in his right hand and says:

As men, we are not taught how to communicate our emotions.

We can't show our weakness, so we take it out.

We have uncontrollable tempers. We blow out tops,

We lash out in anger, we hit the ones we love.

Yes, a lot of us do it out of insecurities, I mean to hurt someone means that we still have power, or so it seems.

He asserts that men's physical aggression towards women is a reactionary response to male weakness and insecurity, rather than evidence of their power. Since they repress their emotion, they want to reassure their power and to solve their emotional frustration and confusion through physical strength over women. Particularly, by using "we," he includes himself in men's contradictions. "After my aunty passed, I started to understand myself. I was writing about the men I knew. My father, me, my brothers, and now, my son." He began his lecture on nonviolence with his personal anecdote; now he extends it to patriarchal cultures across generations. He stresses that we must not hurt someone to empower ourselves.

While Gandhi G introduces his self-reflective discourses on nonviolence, suddenly he gets furious by the fact that his idea was stolen by a contemporary spiritual male guru. Gandhi G's self-approval of his "originality" resonates with D'Lo's legitimization of her (female) masculinity that is regarded as derivative, deviant, and artificial in opposition to biological men's "real" masculinity. Gandhi G says, "My

writings were just about to get published, and you wouldn't believe that bastard Deepak Chopra stole all my writings." Chopra has popularized Indian medicine and spiritual wisdom in the U.S., and he is admired as a successor of Gandhian peace theory. As a (queer Sri Lankan-American female) Gandhi avatar, D'Lo makes believe that Chopra took her position unfairly with plagiarism. By claiming that Gandhi G is a reincarnated Gandhi, and that his thoughts are more original and innovative, D'Lo bestows more superiority and orthodoxy on her fictional character than the prominent real-life male figure (Chopra). In doing so, she authenticates self-representation through gender-bending performance and denotes self-respect for her queer subjectivity. Although it is a groundless, fictional allegation, it is poignant given that Sri Lankan women's voices disappear or are silenced under representative Indian male figures like Gandhi and Chopra who do gain global recognition and attention. Besides, in terms of cultural translation and importation, Chopra's popularity and reputation in the U.S. is reminiscent of the Beatles's huge success over the world as a cultural innovator and trend-maker.<sup>133</sup> Regardless of whether they are South Asian or white, men can be heroes who make changes in the world because they are males.

D'Lo finishes Gandhi G's monologue by giving the key points of her own definition of nonviolence. Gandhi G says:

Always you must ask in any situation.

What am I doing?

Is it hurting anyone?

---

<sup>133</sup> However, as she focuses on nonviolence in this piece, D'Lo does not make further comments about the commercialization of ideas in order to critique global capitalism and to delve into the issue in depth.

Am I hurting myself?

Very simple. Very simple. Just three points.

Deepak Chopra didn't steal this one.

What I can I do to change my behavior to NOT [sic] hurt anyone?

The Gandhi avatar concludes that "hurting of any form" is violence and adds, "My people, do anything you want. Do anything, anything, it's OK," repetitively stretching her left arm outward to punctuate "anything." But he makes sure of one proviso, "Just don't hurt anyone, especially yourself," shaking his index finger emphatically. Finally, Gandhi G smiles peacefully and joins his hands as he makes one last claim: "If you can master this, you too can be a Buddha or a Gandhi." As D'Lo can become a reincarnated Gandhi, she suggests that everyone can be a saint through daily practices of not hurting anyone, including ourselves. Furthermore, she proposes that whether we choose between Buddhism and Hinduism as practitioners of nonviolence does not matter. Her reincarnation of Gandhi gives the audience another lesson for spiritual and religious flexibility and inclusiveness.

D'Lo's body is differently marked and read in "Women 101" and "Nonviolence." She is a Sri Lankan woman, but her race and masculinity are fluidly manipulated by her theatrical versatility according to props, postures, movements, gestures, speaking accent, voice tone, and costumes. Through the two male impersonations, she illustrates how masculinity is constructed, racialized, and performed. The straight guy's hyper (Western/black) masculinity in "Women 101" contrasts with the Gandhi avatar's effeminate (South Asian) masculinity, which might seemingly reinforce the emasculation of Asian men. However, since the two different versions of masculinity are performed

by the same performer with a female Asian body, D’Lo’s presentation of racialized masculinity can be viewed as a quotation of racial performativity. That is, she does not merely reify stereotypes; rather, because she plays both characters within the space of *Ramble-Ations*, she affords the audience an opportunity to see how race is “performed,” and how race informs female masculinity. The audience can witness how two differently racialized masculinities inevitably bump up against each other on the surface of D’Lo’s female body.

Moreover, D’Lo’s performance calls into question ways in which we can measure or evaluate power through the Western standards of “visual” codes of masculinity. Although the straight guy in “Women 101” looks more masculine and assertive, he is a loser who could not satisfy his wife emotionally and sexually. On the contrary, Gandhi G looks gentle and effeminate, but he is a spiritual leader and wise thinker. In this context, Mahatma Gandhi’s emphasis on soul force echoes D’Lo’s characterization and performance that come to terms with visual physicality/displays and invisible soul.

The soul can never be described as weak; [. . .] Even a little girl who has, and knows that she has, a soul of shining purity can stand up to an overbearing Englishman, six-and-a-half foot tall. [. . .] Real power, therefore, consists not in having the physical strength of a giant but in strength of mind, knowledge of the Self [sic] and freedom from the fear of death. (qtd. in Johnson “Gandhi’s Soul Politics” 7)

Gandhi prioritizes soul force over physical strength, which reverses Western/racist conception of power and masculinity. Since the straight guy’s hyper-masculinity looks more powerful and potent, it might top the Gandhi avatar’s mild masculinity. To the

extent that dominant discourses of masculinity privilege body size and visible manliness of Western men, soul force of an Asian man is attributed to the feminine, and it would be hard to be counted as an aspect of masculinity. How can we exhibit “strength of mind” on our body? How can we notice one’s soul force through their bodies? D’Lo’s male impersonation inspires us to realize how our notions of masculinity are both linked to power and are preoccupied with visual markers and physicality.

In this chapter, I have critically examined performances of shorb’s *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* and D’Lo’s *Ramble-Aations* in order to explore how they conceive of and stage queer Asian female masculinity. Although they are Asian, the strategy, process, and themes they use to represent an Asian masculine female subjectivity take on a different trajectory. As a Japanese-white mixed person, shorb concentrates on countering the Orientalistic castration of Asian men and presenting an assertive and aggressive Asian masculinity. In contrast, Sri Lankan D’Lo focuses on demonstrating non-misogynist, self-reflective masculinity through a hip-hop aesthetic blended with Hindi spirituality, capitalizing on racial performativity and ambiguity. Their ethnic differences and other personal experiences in relation to their cultural identities propel their performances in divergent directions. As an East Asian and a South Asian (one light-skinned and potentially read as “white” and the other dark-skinned and potentially read as “black”), they encounter different manifestations of racism. As shorb’s title signifies, racist terms such as gooks, geeks, japs, and chinks specifically target East Asians and project dominant images of Asian men – conning villains, cunning sexual predators, asexual eunuchs, menacing gangsters, and uncomplaining, effeminate servants (Zia 114-118). In D’Lo’s case, she has to deal with exotic primitivism of South Asians,

conflation of Indianness and South Asianness, and racism toward black people.

Accordingly, their bodies on stage are exposed to different stakes arising from the various historical baggage and cultural backdrops of racial prejudices and stereotypes.

Another distinct difference between shorb and D'Lo resides in the ways of creating characters in their work. Whereas shorb wrote monologues of male characters based on critical racial theory and empirical research, D'Lo actively integrates autobiographical input into the development of all her characters. While shorb elaborates and complicates theoretical arguments regarding racial castration of Asian men through performance, D'Lo produces more personal and intimate characters and uses autobiographical material to “ground her political activism” on stage (Chatterjee 445). In addition, since D'Lo has dialogues with audiences as a hip-hop emcee/artist and engages with audiences in the characters, she and the audience can enter into a closer relationship. Her talent for comedy and theatrical versatility render the characters more affectionate and enjoyable.

In terms of audience reception and efficacy, both shorb and D'Lo have to negotiate their own dilemmas and limitations. Since shorb's work concerns specialized issues with respect to (East) Asian American history and emasculation of Asian masculinity, her performance requires a certain degree of cultural competency to read inside metaphors, stories, and agendas. Therefore, depending on individual audiences, the legibility of her performance can be considerably limited. It could be hard for most audiences to relate to and to identify with the characters. On the contrary, D'Lo's characters are very accessible to audiences due to her warm and hilarious persona and multicultural, inclusive politics, and yet, her comic approach might run the risk of

defusing the seriousness of the issues she addresses, and she may fail to delve into complex layers of social contradictions in depth.

As such, shorb's and D'Lo's works demonstrate how female masculinity is constituted, embodied, and performed in the interplay of other social markers. Importantly, they illustrate how problematic it is to homogenize "Asianness" and testify that Asian American cultures are "partly modified as well as partly invented" at the sites of a variety of inside differences (Lowe 2000: 427). shorb endeavors to restore the Asian phallus on the female body by depicting Asian men as competent pitchers (tops), not as subservient catchers (bottoms). D'Lo invites audiences to a more humane community across racial lines, portraying a beautiful female masculinity that "makes grace and strength complements rather than opposites" (Crowder 59). Considering the dearth of performance work by queer Asian women and the Western focus within female masculinity studies, shorb's and D'Lo's groundbreaking works pave the way to achieve a greater visibility of Asian female masculinity.

### Chapter 3: Performing Queer Genders in Drag King Shows

[D]rag kings strip expectations, prove that what you see isn't always fact.

[. . .]

Drag kings show that body language is the most powerful of all.

[. . .]

Drag kings can be convinced of their brilliance, know you have walk [sic] proud in the suit you're wearing.

Drag kings are cultural critics – asking, wanting, daring.

Still, a drag king can be a dick, and that's the twist of misogyny and the –isms, they creep into crevices, cause schisms.

But a Drag king is smart enough to revise the internalized, to connect the dots of struggles fought and become an ally.

—Neeve (“hot like coals”)<sup>134</sup>

We may use the language of nobility, of princess and kings, but the only nobility we should aspire to is to fight each other's oppression.

—Leslie Feinberg (qtd. in Widner)

Since Judith Halberstam established the theorization of drag king performance in the late 1990s, drag king cultures have evolved tremendously, presenting a wide variety of styles and themes. Drag king performance has grown to be a pivotal site for entertainment, gender exploration, and political commentary/activism in lesbian/queer communities. Whereas “maleness competitions, often with money prizes” were predominant in the early scene of drag king performance (Maltz 282), many drag king troupes have been formed all over the U.S., and drag king shows have been transformed into ensemble cabaret acts that function as a sort of community theatre. Today, drag

---

<sup>134</sup> Neeve (Pat Riarch) is a drag king/spoken word artist. Neeve performed hir spoken word piece, “hot like coals” at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Drag KingCommunity [sic] Extravaganza Sunday cabaret brunch event. I am very grateful to Neeve for giving me a copy of the text. I transcribe this quotation as it is in the original text.

kings employ diverse theatrical forms such as skits, performance art, dance, pantomime, burlesque, multimedia video projection, spoken word, live rapping, circus/acrobatics, and magic in addition to the traditional lip-sync of performances of the 1990s.

Conventionally, one drag king act runs under five minutes, and the performers use one song per skit or use short, mixed music. Except for rare cases, drag kings lip-sync and pantomime without speech.<sup>135</sup> Their subject matters range from gender fluidity to busting gender rules and categories, queer desire/eroticism, homophobia, sexual/religious taboos, racism, feminism, anti-war, and many other political issues. Also, drag kings deconstruct dominant representations by queering popular culture. Furthermore, they use the stage to look into and address inner contradictions within the drag king culture such as body size privilege,<sup>136</sup> the idealization of slim bodies, masculine privilege, and the marginalization of femmes.

In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the diversity of masculinities in queer subcultural venues by examining how drag kings perform masculinities in the intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Moreover, I delve into how drag kings deconstruct the normative gender binary and stage queer genders by taking advantage of theatrical devices for various strategies and purposes. I analyze select performances from the 6<sup>th</sup> (Chicago 2004) and 8<sup>th</sup> (Austin 2006) International Drag KingCommunity [sic] Extravaganza that I attended as a member of the audience. Since the International Drag KingCommunity Extravaganza (IDKE) showcase presents many

---

<sup>135</sup> Unless I specifically mention that they use their real voices, all drag king performers that I deal with in this chapter lip-sync and pantomime without speech and dialogue in their acts.

<sup>136</sup> What I mean by body privilege is that whereas small and short drag kings are relatively emasculated, tall and big drag kings are recognized as more masculine.

drag king acts by diverse gender variants from different cities in one place, it is a useful text to observe different performance styles and manifold masculinities and to investigate multiple issues and controversies concerning drag king performance.

Although drag king performance does not exclusively mean performing masculinity, since I focus on representations of female masculinities of butches and other genderqueers in my project, I limit my study to the subversive potentials and inner contradictions of performing masculinities in drag king shows. Of course, with just one chapter, I cannot encompass all the diversity, characteristics, and polemics in the drag king scenes. I do not aim to document and analyze all the pieces that were presented in the IDKE events. Rather, I select exemplary performances so that I can delve into my critical interests and concerns regarding drag king performance through my various illustrations. Thus, unlike other chapters in which I describe each performance in its entirety, in this chapter, I will closely read only a few main exemplary performances – The Dangers & Noah Boyz, Charleston Chu, Chicago Most Unwanted, and Gendermyn – through critical performance analysis in depth. Instead, I present more diverse examples to investigate thorny issues and heated debates surrounding drag king performance. Considering that the majority of drag kings are still white, spurred on by my own critical awareness of the invisibility of drag kings of color, I primarily concentrate on addressing how drag kings of color represent their masculinities and engage with racial implications of performing masculinity. I value performances that mark important historical and political shifts and alterations in the drag king culture. I highlight drag kings who innovate in terms of styles and politics and make critical comments on the history of discourses and politics of gender and sexuality.

In addition, I will discuss a couple of remarkable trends and political strands that are found in many performances through a few representative examples. For instance, currently, many drag kings enact gay persona/sexuality and reappropriate dominant representations (Broadway musicals and popular films) to queerly reconstruct them. And some drag king troupes take the stage in order to combine gender-bending performance with political theatre that remarks on social issues. As Halberstam stresses, although many drag kings invest “in pleasure and in play,” drag king scenes are “serious realms for the production of gender difference and the accommodation of gender variance” (Volcano and Halberstam 1999: 39). By illustrating different styles of masculinity and introducing diverse approaches to drag king performance, I will demonstrate how “gender difference and variance” are constituted and performed in the interlocking of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and geographical locations. In so doing, I will contend that drag kings illuminate the artificiality of masculinity through their theatrical performances of masculine genders in general and mark differences amongst drag king masculinities in particular in the intersection of masculinity and other social identities. In my comprehensive conclusion to this chapter, I will evaluate the progressive potentials and limitations of drag king performance. Before I describe and analyze in depth select exemplary performances, I want to outline the contexts and politics of drag king performance by introducing the history of IDKE and by discussing the definition of the drag king, as well as costume as a tool to play out gender performativity.

The foundation and success of IDKE have played a key role in expanding and enriching the American drag king culture and community. The first IDKE was founded

by Julie Applegate (Jake), Donna Troka (dj love), Sile Singleton (Luster/Lustivious de la Virgion [sic]), and Shani Scott (Maxwell), in conjunction with H.I.S. kings, Fast Friday Productions, the Kings Court, and many other Columbus community members in Columbus, OH in 1999.<sup>137</sup> IDKE continued in Columbus for the next four years, and after FTM Productions hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> IDKE in Minneapolis, IDKE began changing venues annually. Since then, IDKE was held in Chicago (2004) and in Winnipeg, Canada (2005), and the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE was hosted by Austin Dragsters in 2006. In 2004, IDKE changed the name from “drag king” to “drag king community” in order to “make explicit that IDKE is now, has always been and shall always be a place for a wide variety of performances, theorists, arts, activism, and expressions of the fluid nature of gender.”<sup>138</sup> Halberstam’s research focused on individual drag king performers in New York, London, and San Francisco in *Female Masculinity* (1998) and in *The Drag King Book* (1999). However, as many drag king troupes have been formed across the nation, and IDKE has been held in different cities, the drag king culture has undergone discursive geographical shifts. IDKE has offered the opportunities and resources to build a critical drag king community and to network among drag king performers/troupes, lesbian/queer artists, critics, and academics, sharing diverse drag king performances and discussing drag king agendas.

The definition of “drag king” has been contested, destabilized, and problematized, both in academic work and in performance. Usually, “drag” implies cross-dressing or

---

<sup>137</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE program book, p.3

<sup>138</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE program book, p.5

cross-gender performance.<sup>139</sup> However, many butch and genderqueer kings do not think that they perform the “opposite” gender of their own. For them, wearing masculine clothing and presenting masculine gender displays are perceived as natural and quotidian. Some drag kings tend to enhance or exaggerate their masculinity in a more theatrical way on stage; unlike casual drag performers, masculine drag kings still perform their embodied masculinity off stage. In the panel discussion of “Embodied Drag: Performing (or not) Our Lived Identities” at the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE, white drag king Jake Danger said that she feels more like she is doing drag when she performs a high-femme or feminine woman on stage because she plays the opposite gender from her daily performance of masculine gender. In the drag king documentary *XY: Drag*,<sup>140</sup> black drag king Singleton explains his feminine character, Lustivious de la Virgion: “I’ve had a question.<sup>141</sup> Am I a drag king? [. . .] The character that I do looks like a high femme, but what she actually is, is my male persona doing drag queen.” *XY: Drag* features both his male persona lip-syncing to Al Green’s “Let’s Stay Together” and serving as MC as a high femme (drag queen), wearing a dress, a bright pink-red wig, and thick make-up. Singleton’s performance of queer femininity is distinct from a male drag queen or female

---

<sup>139</sup> The term “drag” is said to originate from the acronym D.R.A.G “(D)ressed As a Girl), referring to male actors playing female roles” (Nataf 63). Some claim that drag was male homosexuals’ female attire or male actors’ theatrical costume when playing female parts in the middle or late of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Senelick 85). Yet there is no confirmed agreement about the exact origin of the term. Though the term “drag queen” (a male gay cross-dressing performer) has become popular in gay culture, lesbians and female-born genderqueers have opted to use the term “drag king,” as the counterpart to drag queens. Halberstam reports that in America, “no extensive drag king culture developed within lesbian bar culture” prior to the emergence and visibility of the drag king culture in the early 1990s (1998: 234). In this chapter, I focus on the American drag king scenes in the 2000s. To read more about the drag king scenes in the 1990s, refer to Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* (1998) and *The Drag King Anthology* (2002) edited by Donna Troka, Kathleen Lebesco, and Jean Bobby Noble.

<sup>140</sup> The film *XY: Drag* is directed by Robin Deisher in 2002. I am very grateful to Heidi Madsen (Toe B) for sending me a DVD of the film.

<sup>141</sup> Singleton identifies as transgender. According to his preference, I use male pronouns for Singleton.

femininity of the lesbian femme. In *XY: Drag*, in addition to playing the high-femme MC and a masculine character, Luster, Singleton also appears as himself, sporting piercings on nose and lip, a black t-shirt, and a black baseball cap. It is in his own persona that he comments on drag king performance and culture. This striking juxtaposition of three colliding images along with his words inspires me to rethink “what it means to do drag king,” and prompts me to explore the complex layers of drag kinging in relation to sex, gender(s), and to gender (dis)continuity between on and off stage personas.

Like Singleton’s example, some drag kings enact both male/or masculine and female/or feminine personae to explore a gender spectrum and play with gender fluidity. Therefore, the term drag king does not exclusively imply performing masculinity in the current drag king scenes. For Haitian-American drag king Dréd (Mildréd Diyaa Gerestant) who identifies as a “gender-illusionist,” drag king is all about transformation, not about performing coherent masculinity and butchness:

I like my audience to see me “morph”—for example, from Busta Rhymes to P. Diddy to Shaft to Grace Jones—right before their eyes. I don’t like to put limits on how I express myself. We all have feminine and masculine energy. [. . .] I choose to experience and show both sides, and everything in between [sic]! Fluidity is my nature. I identify just as I feel at the moment. [. . .] It’s very natural for me to wear a mix of gender or sex-identified clothing—for example, putting on a men’s pin-striped suit, with a tight top that shows cleavage. (Gerestant 45-46)

Dréd takes it for granted that as her gender is fluid, her stage performance also reflects who she is. She does not fix her gender identity and lets it be in a constant state of flux. If the drag kinging refers only to theatrical performance of butchness or masculinity, it cannot include Dréd's gender exploration of both genders and in-betweens. Besides, currently, many femmes and feminine queer women perform in drag king shows. Depending on individual performers' understanding of drag king performance and their configuration of their own genders, drag kinging is differently conceived, defined, and reclaimed.

Some genderqueer drag kings challenge the definition of the drag king as a "female" performer who plays masculinity. The increasing participation of transgenders, transsexuals, and non-female-identified genderqueers complicates the relations between maleness and performed drag king masculinity. Irrespective of whether they underwent a medical transition or took hormones, as long as they identify as male or non-female, the drag king is not limited only to female-bodied and female-identified persons. In hir e-mail correspondence with me, Chinese-American drag king Sand Chang (Charleston Chu) writes, "I identify as genderqueer/transgender/gender fluid, and I don't see my performance so much as female masculinity. Charleston [hir drag persona], actually is more like feminine masculinity."<sup>142</sup> The term "feminine masculinity" does not mark biological sex and denotes that it can be embodied by males and females. White performer Cody Las Vegas coins an alternative term for FTM

---

<sup>142</sup> Chang's e-mail response to me on Oct 25, 2006. I use "ze" and "hir" to indicate Chang/Charleston Chu. Chang performs both as Charleston Chu (a male gay persona) and as fiesty faux queen Charlotte Starlette.

transgender drag kings without a female marker. Cody Las Vegas says, “I am a transformer (trans+performer) whose mission is to entertain, to educate, and to eradicate hate, as well as make a point that gender is not a concern to the stage or to life and of itself. Gender is a social construct that serves no purpose but to segregate.”<sup>143</sup> He proposes “transformer” without any indication of sex, which reflects on queer resistance against the labeling and categorizing that limit diversity and excludes flexibility within the queer community.

As I illustrate, many drag kings renew and expand the traditional definition of the drag king through performance and new terminology. Some androgynous or masculine drag kings perform both masculine and feminine personas. Feminine women play feminine characters and sometimes do masculine roles, wearing men’s costumes and make-up in a theatrical skit in ensemble. Some transgender drag kings devise new terms without a sex marker (such as “feminine masculinity” and “transformer”) in explaining their drag king practices. Thus, current drag king shows can be more broadly understood as “gender performance cabarets” wherein variously gendered subjects collaboratively explore gender fluidity and multiplicity.

Despite the diversity of performance styles and politics of drag kings, one vital aspect of all drag king performances is that performers heavily depend on costume. Although lip-syncing music often contextualizes and frames drag king performance, it is through costume that all drag kings wear masculinities and make manifest the artificiality of gender on stage. Therefore, it is necessary to pay closer attention to the importance

---

<sup>143</sup> Cody Las Vegas’ e-mail response to me on Oct 26, 2006

of costume in connection with wearing multiple identities and gender performativity. As Halberstam asserts, “Within the theatre of mainstream gender roles, femininity is often presented as simply costume whereas masculinity manifests as realism or as body” (1998: 258). Exposing the artificiality of masculinity through costume serves to undermine the impenetrable “realness” of dominant masculinity and to similarly reduce masculinity to artifice, just as femininity is all costume and construction. Using costume, drag kings explore the constructed nature of gender and materialize gender variance, including masculinities devoid of biological maleness. In many cases, drag king costumes are carefully chosen to signify the race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, vocation, and politics of characters and personae that performers enact. Since most drag king performances rely on lip-syncing to music and visual presentation without speech, the role and effect of costume are more crucial and significant in drag king shows than in many other theatrical forms. Some drag kings prefer layered clothing in order to overlap different identities and genders. While seeing costume-changing play, drag king audiences can read “multiple code shiftings from male to female, from one brand of masculinity to another, from tough drag kings to sexy stripper” (Halberstam 1998: 262-263).

For example, in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, white drag king DeVin (Vancouver, Canada) appears as a “young man” who enjoys his own toughness, wearing a long-sleeve shirt, baggy pants, and facial hair (beard). As “his” dance moves become more feminine, DeVin takes off her shirt and pants and reveals her tight black tank top and long skirt. She removes her socks and puts them in her black top as pads to make her breasts look bigger. Sometimes, genderqueers use socks for “packing” – stuffing crotch

with a prosthetic supplement – as a substitute for a dildo. However, DeVin performs masculinity without masculine packing, and in fact, does femininity with feminine packing (socks as padding) to underline the artificiality of female femininity. As she removes her masculine bandana around her head, she reveals a rhinestone accessory like a small crown. Through this change of costume, DeVin demonstrates the transformation of her gender from man to woman and foregrounds the mutability of gender. Just as she wears two kinds of clothing, she embodies and expresses both genders and in-between hybridity. Furthermore, her transformation can be read multiply – from a closeted gay man to a drag queen, from a drag king to a drag queen, from a butch lesbian to a femme lesbian – and so forth. Like in DeVin’s performance, costumes in drag king shows function as a very effective tool to conceal and reveal gender expressions/identities and to highlight the constructed nature of gender.

Costumes can signify imposed social norms as well as hidden queer identity or genuine self-identity; costumes, like gender, can be social straightjackets. Thus, tearing off superficial clothing and exposing another layer of clothing symbolize active resistance and self-empowerment. In drag king troupe Cuntry [sic] Kings’ (Durham, NC) performance for the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, a black drag king appears as a “Black Nanny,” wearing a typical black nanny costume of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reminiscent of Aunt Jemima.<sup>144</sup> As the character develops a critical consciousness of racism, she tears off the nanny costume. Then, the audience sees her t-shirt with the word “self” in a red heart. Her maid costume signifies racist stereotypes and myths of the loyal, dutiful, and

---

<sup>144</sup> Cuntry Kings perform this theatrical skit as an ensemble, pantomiming and lip-syncing to Whitney Houston’s “It’s Not Right, But It’s Okay.”

contented black “mammy.” The black nanny clothing was forcefully dressed on the black female body by white racist society. As she rips off the maid costume and and refuses to “do” a black nanny role, she discovers self-love and turns into an activist who challenges racial discrimination and oppression. Similarly, in a monthly show by Austin drag king troupe Kings N Things (KNT),<sup>145</sup> a white drag king plays a young genderqueer boy who loves feminine toys and clothing. He appears on stage, wearing a conventional boy’s costume: a light blue shirt and check-patterned shorts. Later, the audience comes to see that he was wearing a skirt inside the shorts when he takes out the edge of the skirt and lets it cover his shorts. His proud wearing of a skirt defies gender normalcy and pronounces his true identity. Also, many drag kings represent conservative politicians and religious leaders as closeted queers by taking off suits and religious gowns, and exposing inner leather clothing or flamboyant gay costumes. Drag kings productively use costume in order to experiment with shifting and unstable identities on stage and to unmask dominant assumptions of race, gender, and sexuality by playing with the incongruity between what is apparently seen and what he/she actually is (or are).

Much as how I have stressed the theatricality of masculinity in drag king acts by means of costume, throughout this chapter, I posit how drag kings denaturalize masculinity and disrupt the heteronormative gender binary. Furthermore, I explore ways in which drag kings redefine and expand the established discourses of gender and sexuality by staging queer genders. And yet I am also interested in examining the

---

<sup>145</sup> It was performed on Apr 21, 2006, at the club Elysium in Austin.

contradictions and limitations that they display in their subversive gender performances. Halberstam articulates that drag kings “expose the structure of dominant masculinity by making it theatrical and by rehearsing the repertoire of roles and types on which such masculinity depends” (1998:239). However, the “repertoire of roles and types” of masculinity, which has been constructed within the dominant representation system and ideology, is differently chosen from by individual performers according to their politics and subject positions. Drag kings demystify the naturalness of masculinity by revealing “its mechanisms – the tricks and poses, the speech patterns and attitudes that have been seamlessly assimilated into a performance of realness” (Volcano and Halberstam 1999: 62). Even as I agree with this point, I find it necessary to note that since the “mechanisms” and “artifice” of masculinity are already constructed and inflected by racial, ethnic, class, and any other stereotypes, the exposure of the artifice of masculinity does not always guarantee subversions of dominant discourses.

Drag king acts require a great deal of audiences’ concentration and cultural competency if they are to critically read the performance. This is especially true because drag kings employ many cultural references and engage with racial, ethnic, sexual, and class markers and codes in a very short performance while music for lip-sync plays loudly. Thus, it is important to consider “where the performance takes place, in front of whom, by whom, and for what purpose” (Pauliny 231). In this context, I believe that many of drag kings carefully contemplate how and what they perform. Nevertheless, a white drag king may unwittingly exhibit white privilege and perpetuate racist images in performing masculinity. Conversely, a drag king of color is burdened to overturn dominant representations of people of color with an already racialized body

that “often has been commodified for pleasure” and evokes racist notions (Pauliny 232). Therefore, regardless of their intentions, performances of drag kings of color are ever in danger of reinforcing racial stereotypes.

I have overviewed drag king performance by discussing the (re)definition of the drag king and the function of costume, and by emphasizing the need to examine the contradictions and limitations inherent in gender transgression. In the following section, I analyze select exemplary performances from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcases as in-depth case studies. All performances in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase were presented at the club Metro in Chicago on Oct 16, 2004. The Metro is a big cabaret-style theatre. The showcase featured 30 drag king acts. All of the audience members saw the performance, standing, and there was no space between the platform stage and the first row of the audience. The 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase was held at The Palmer Events Center in Austin on Oct 21, 2006. As in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE, there was no space between the platform stage and the first row of the audience, but there were chairs (audience seats) in a row on the floor. Some audience members had a seat, and others saw the showcase, standing. Since the performance place was a huge space, the auditorium was not fully packed. Hence, the atmosphere was much more intimate in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase.

All-white drag king project group The Dangers & Noah Boyz’s (Santa Barbara, CA) performance in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase deals with conflicts and divisions among feminism, lesbianism, and transgenderism, and proposes coalition building and mutual respect. The Dangers & Noah Boyz (DNB) plays an androgynous and fat dyke (Noah Boyz), a femme lesbian (Jake Danger), and a FTM Transgender (Damien Danger), using Naked Eyes’ “Promises, Promises” for their lip-sync music. This piece overviews the

history of gender and sexual politics in the U.S.: from radical feminism in the 1970s to Sex-Wars in the 1980s and to the emergence of queer politics and transgenderism. As Zachary I. Nataf documents in *Lesbians Talk Transgender*, within gender-centric feminism, “Male-to-female transsexual lesbian feminists were vilified and expelled as infiltrators, followed by s/m, queers and now the new Other: female-to-male transsexuals and transgenderists” (40).<sup>146</sup> The dyke wears a check-patterned shirt and brown pants, and the femme wears big ring-earrings, a black shirt, a black short skirt, black long boots, and thick make-up. The trans man wears tight underwear to make his chest flat and black t-shirt with the words “Transsexual Menace.” The phrase “transsexual menace” echoes “Lavender Menace,” which was a zap action of the Radical Lesbians at the Second Congress to Unite Women to protest heterosexism within the women’s movement in 1970.<sup>147</sup> Just as lesbian feminists criticized and challenged the exclusion of lesbian issues in women’s movement in the 1970s, now transgenders take issue with transphobia within feminist and lesbian communities.

DNB portrays transphobia within lesbian/feminist communities at the beginning of the performance. They stand in a line at regular intervals on stage, facing the audience. When they walk toward upstage, the androgynous dyke keeps the trans guy from entering a place for a woman-only event, pointing to the sign of the woman (♀) on her inner t-shirt. In contrast, the femme is welcomed to the imaginary women-only

---

<sup>146</sup> S/M is an abbreviation for sadomasochism – a “form of consensual sexual play” to explore fantasies of domination and submission and “(sometimes) pain” (*The Gay Almanac* 95).

<sup>147</sup> On May 1, 1970, seventeen of the Radical Lesbians wore lavender t-shirts with LAVENDER MENACE stenciled on, and distributed the paper, “Woman-Identified Woman,” which sought to redefine lesbianism from a feminist perspective (Echols 215-216).

feminist event. Frustrated by this, the trans guy lip-syncs to “You made me promises, promises/Knowing I’d believe promises, promises/You knew you’d never keep.”

Although the song is originally about betrayal and how love hurts, in this piece, it is extensively interpreted as a critical comment on the issues of distrust and splits among different social movements and identity politics. The dyke’s emphasis on the woman sign is redolent of the political definition of the lesbian, “woman-identified woman,” in the early 1970s and implicitly suggests the accusation of male-identification and masculinity at the time. Describing how feminists make sense of him as a transsexual man in “Reading Like a (Transsexual) Man,” Henry S. Rubin writes, “I am a traitor. Either I was a spy [. . .] or I was a woman who gave up my womanhood in a mistaken bid for male power” (307). Privileging feminist androgyny, lesbian-feminists rooted in separatist cultural feminism in the 1970s regarded the FTM transgender as a politically reactionary misogynist who is complicit with the enemy (and male-dominant ideology).

Shortly, the trans guy makes fun of the fat dyke. As the dyke takes off her shirt, she wears a black tank top with the sign ♀, and her fat belly is seen. The dyke hands an admission ticket to the trans guy to get into an imaginary queer event. However, the trans guy mocks the dyke, pointing to her belly and tears off the ticket. He initially finds the dyke not desirable because she is big.<sup>148</sup> While the femme beside the trans guy passively joins the trans guy’s laughing at the dyke, she quickly becomes embarrassed, covering her belly with her hand because she is also fat. In the first segment, the dyke was an insider who outcasted the trans guy, but she becomes an outsider because of the

---

<sup>148</sup> Mel Corn (Jake Danger)’s explanation in her e-mail to me on Nov 8, 2006.

idealization of the slim body. Just as the trans guy did, the androgynous dyke lip-syncs to “You made me promises, promises/You knew you’d never keep/ [. . .] Why do I believe?” touching her belly in displeasure and agony. As such, DNB circulates the positions of the privileged and the marginalized and implicates themselves in self-contradictions, relocating the power dynamics among them.

Returning downstage and changing their standing locations, they insinuate that another exclusion of the femme will happen. The femme wears a necklace with enormous rainbow rings as a marker of the lesbian/queer. The dyke wears a jean jacket, and the trans guy wears a black baseball cap. When they return to upstage, a place of mutual exclusions and discriminations, the trans guy and the dyke shake hands with each other signifying their bond; in doing so, they make the femme invisible. The femme shakes the rainbow rings to ensure that she is a lesbian in front of the dyke and trans guy, but they totally ignore her because of her hyper-femininity. The femme is not recognized as an equal and visible queer member. She throws her rainbow medal and lip-syncs “You can’t finish what you start. If this is love, it breaks my heart. You made me promises, promises. You knew never keep.” Throughout this segment, DNB points out how often femme lesbians are treated like heterosexual women because masculinity is a visible marker of lesbianism, and by doing so, DNB criticizes the butch privilege in lesbian and queer communities.

Toward the end of the scene, they point at each other to indicate blame. They briefly break apart for self-reflection, and then reunite and reconfirm the promise of solidarity beyond personal interests, smiling at each other and putting their arms around each other’s shoulders. Realizing that they cannot tear apart their small queer

community and that they need to accept each other, their performance urges the audience to build mutual support and to create a more inclusive community. Since DNB performs this piece only with one song within a short act, inevitably, they cannot depict in more detail the process of how they can come to unify. Nevertheless, their performance is meaningful in that they critically reflect on the past and present of lesbian and queer history and redress the political errors of separating feminism, lesbianism, and transgenderism from each other. In a critical awareness of the interconnectedness of social contradictions, they propose that feminism should be allied with queer politics such that they can supplement and expand each other. In this way, DNB's performance manifests drag kings' political efforts to create a productive conversation and combination between feminist politics and transgenderism. DNB shows that masculine genderqueer drag kings "are coalescing to create new feminisms which valorize female gender/sex incongruities as having political force and possibility" (Malts 280). By simultaneously addressing transphobia, normalization of women's bodies, and masculine privilege, they subvert the feminist charge that ascribes women's masculinity or male identification to misogynist anti-feminism.

Yet DNB does not take further steps to reckon with white privilege and racial divisions in the history of feminist/lesbian/queer communities and activism. I would have liked to have seen a performer of color in their piece so that they can explore how "promises" for solidarity have been broken through racism. Paradoxically, the absence of the body of color on stage resonates to me with the invisibility and marginalization of people of color in feminism, lesbianism, and queer politics.

In their pursuits of alternative queer masculinities, some drag kings employ gay personas and sexuality in their performances. Categorizing this form of drag king acts as “Fag Drag,” Halberstam writes that some lesbians draw on a positive fetishization of gay male sex culture and cultivate their masculinity and their sex play through gay male models (1998:253). She adds that this “drag king imitation” of a gay male aesthetic arises from copying the “Castro clone” which “refers to popular masculine aesthetic within urban gay ghettos that depend on leather and denim and a queer biker look” (ibid). Halberstam does not note any relevant link between the mode of “fag drag” and the emergence of transgenders and homo-gendered eroticism between masculine lesbians and genderqueers. However, there are a few significant factors of fag drag acts that cannot be solely attributed to the imitative nature of the Castro clone. Whereas gay culture has been highly sexualized, and overt expression of gay eroticism is highly visible, lesbian sexuality has been relatively underrepresented. In both mainstream films and in lesbian and gay films, gay sexuality tends to be graphically depicted, but lesbian sexuality tends to be implied through metaphors or to be desexualized as soft-core and emotional. Therefore, adopting gay male models in drag king performance provides an outlet for explicit expression of masculine female sexuality. Moreover, enacting gay masculinity allows drag kings to explore “feminine masculinity” or “perverse masculinity/femininity” distinguished from heterosexual male masculinity and conventional female masculinity (butchness).

In addition, I think that homo-gender attraction between masculine genderqueers and the reference to leatherdyke S/M boy-daddy relationships have something to do with fag drag acts. Analyzing leatherdyke boy-daddy play in queer S/M communities,

transgender theorist C. Jacob Hale maintains that leatherdyke boy-daddy play promotes “gender exploration, solidification, resistance, destabilization, and reconfiguration” (63). For instance, two white drag kings’ theatrical interpretation of George Michael’s “Father Figure” in the film *XY: Drag* exemplifies a boy-daddy relationship that explores the power play and eroticism between masculine lesbians. Breaking the religious taboo for homosexuality, they situate a sexual attraction and affair between a “priest” and an “altar boy.” With the refrain of the song, “I will be your father figure/Put your tiny hand in mine/I will be your preacher teacher,” the “priest” embodies seductive daddying (queer fathering) for “love, support, nurturance, and guidance” in homoerotic ecstasy (Hale 65). As religious faithfulness and sanctity are queerly transformed into lustful sensuality, the “altar boy” emerges as a gay leather boy when the “priest” strips him of his outer white soutane. These female bodies expand masculine genders and sexuality of lesbians by playing male gay characters. Independently, they can be read on numerous levels: two butch lesbians or two gay men or two FTM transgenders. As the “altar boy” simulates fellatio with the “priest’s” dildo,<sup>149</sup> they destabilize relations of the body (sex) and lesbian gender and sexuality as well as demonstrate how gender variance among female-bodied genderqueers fosters alternative sexuality. Reclaiming gay sexuality in drag king performance helps drag kings articulate homoerotic butchness and blur the sexual boundary between gays and lesbians.

Charleston Chu (Sand Chang)’s solo dance piece wherein ze lip-syncs to Jonny

---

<sup>149</sup> Although the drag king playing the “priest” does not expose her dildo, since it is apparent that they are females, this scene suggests that the “altar boy” is simulating fellatio with the priest’s dildo.

McGovern the Gay Pimp's "Lookin' Cute/Feelin' Cute" is a paradigmatic performance with which to examine refashioning of gay male aesthetics/sexuality.<sup>150</sup> Since Chinese-American drag king Chang performs a white gay musician's dance number, hir performance allows for more room to investigate complicated and nuanced meanings of fag impersonation. When I saw hir performance in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, I was intrigued by hir queer recycling of racial stereotypes and dance versatility in fag drag. As I focus on work by drag kings of color and genderqueers, I interviewed hir via-email to obtain contextual information for my close reading of hir performance. Chang explains hir drag character, Charleston Chu:

[H]e is a gay Asian American man who challenges stereotypes by simultaneously reinforcing and deconstructing them. [. . .] The first name "Charleston" seemed like the type of somewhat formal and old-fashioned name that some Asian parents might choose for their son. It also refers to a dance, and my drag character emphasizes dance. [. . .] The last name "Chu" reflects my Chinese ancestry. [. . .] The name "Charleston Chu" is a play on the candy bar (Charleston Chew).<sup>151</sup>

As Chang remarks, her drag persona was created to highlight hir dance specialty with a strong Asian-identification and critical engagement in racial stereotypes of Asian gay

---

<sup>150</sup> Self-proclaimed Gay Pimp, Jonny McGovern is a white out, gay comedian and singer. The song, "Lookin' Cute/Feelin' Cute" is on his debut album, *Dirty Gay Hits*, which was released in 2003.

<sup>151</sup> I e-mailed Chang to ask thirteen questions regarding hir performance, Asian masculinity, and hir gender identifications and received hir answers via e-mail on Jan 31, 2007. All quotation of Chang's statements is from the e-mail interview. I am deeply grateful for hir cooperation and support for my research.

men.<sup>152</sup> In hir efforts to politicize Asian identity, ze intentionally twists the song by a white gay musician to give an overtly racial rendition in hir performance.

Through hir dance piece, Chang attempts to depict an Asian gay man who revels in looking and feeling cute, and who enjoys being faggy. Ze does not set a story line and predominantly relies on hir dance moves to portray the character. Chang clarifies hir intention:

Charleston Chu is a flaming gay man, so he reinforces some stereotypes of gay men. However, rather than be asexual or submissive as many Asian men are portrayed, Charleston is direct, upfront, in-your-face, and not afraid to show and celebrate his sexuality. He has no shame in being who he is, even if that means that his brand of “masculinity” is seen as “feminine” by others. [. . .] Charleston shows that he is in the conflict. He wants to be himself (“effeminate”), but he also wants to show the world that he doesn’t fit the stereotypes.

To counter stereotypes that Asian (gay) men are asexual and subservient, Chang appropriates the in-your-face style and salacity of Gay Pimp’s “Lookin’ Cute/Feelin’ Cute.” Originally, the song was an anthem for over-the-top fagness and sexual licentiousness of gay men.<sup>153</sup> Charleston Chu’s excessive fagness is a deliberate taking

---

<sup>152</sup> The Charleston is a dance that is associated with the lindy hop (an African-American dance) and swing jazz music.

<sup>153</sup> McGovern created the gay pimp character in order to critically respond to white hip-hop singer Eminem’s homophobic music. Before he began his music career, he wrote a “big, flashy, glamorous, funny show,” *The Wrong Fag to Fuck with: The Gay Pimp vs. Eminem*, to protest homophobic propaganda and hyper-masculinity. Afterwards, the gay pimp became his singing persona. As the name “pimp” indicates, he has paraded his nonconforming sexuality and pro-sex spirit, and celebrated fagness through his music (Weiss).

on the stereotype of effeminized Asian gay/masculinity and subversive self-affirmation of his genderqueer practice.

In line with the song, Chang's dance is infused with "gender-fuck" choreography to mix queeny and cute gestures (femininity) and sexy waves with powerful hip-hop dance moves (masculinity). Charleston appears on stage, wearing a green sport jacket, dark gray athletic pants with the sides unbuttoned (that can easily be torn away later), a green sport headband, and a soul patch (a tiny amount of facial hair). Pointing to the audience and dancing rhythmically, he lip-syncs to the words "You're a gay, but it's Okay/It's a present from Jesus, everyday." Then, while he lip-syncs to the lyrics "People are just jealous of you cause you're looking cute and feeling cute," he turns around and stops with a cute pose, putting his hand on the back of his head and waves his hip. Through these lyrics, flamboyant fagginess, which is condemned by heteronormative society, is reclaimed as a special gift that people envy. Chang deftly embodies a delightful and cute fagginess in exulted spirits with his dance movements and facial expressions. As the song plays, "They call you a fag/I think that's right cause I fuck your daddies," Charleston unzips and takes off his jacket and thrusts his pelvis, spinning the jacket over his head. This masculine movement contrasts with his previous faggy and cute gestures. When he tears away the jacket and unbuttoned pants, the audience sees his inner yellow t-shirt with the texts of "Charleston Chu ♥ u," green short shorts, green wristbands, and his white long tube socks. Responding to my question about an analogy between his yellow t-shirt and Asianness, Chang answers that tearing off the top layer (outer jacket) symbolizes boldly embracing his race/skin color. Previously, I have seen a white drag king's impersonation of the Gay Pimp in a monthly show of an Austin

drag king troupe KNT. The white king wore a tight, dark blue sleeveless t-shirt that was emblazoned with the sequined words “Gay Pimp” and blue jeans, which is a typical stage costume of the original artist McGovern.<sup>154</sup> On the contrary, to foreground Asian identity and to materialize hir deliberate adoption of the music, Chang dresses and performs as Asian “Charleston Chu,” instead of the white “Gay Pimp.”

As Charleston takes off the outer clothing, his cheerful dancing in the new outfit intimates that Charleston takes pride in his body size and shape as well as in his dirty fagness. In Charleston’s yellow sleeveless t-shirt and short shorts, Chang’s chest is bound, and hir crotch looks bulgy with packing. With the new costume, Charleston looks cuter, and his plump body is more exposed. Although Chang uses a white male gay’s music for hir performance, Charleston’s presence with a chubby Asian (female) body critically comments on the idealized tall, slim, and muscled white gay male body. His amusing and confident attitude does not display any hesitation to proudly present his body. In my e-mail interview with hir, Chang says that ze intended to deconstruct “gay male media images tied in with capitalism and the commodification of gay culture.” As Chang acknowledges, however, it is not certain that the audience read hir subtle commentary on consumerism and the gay body because the song does not contain the lyrics pertinent to a critique of commodification of gay culture, and most audiences were paying attention to hir dance moves.

Through the alteration of dance techniques, using the whole space of the stage, Charleston further explores his genderqueerness and obscene fagness. During the

---

<sup>154</sup> On Apr 22, 2005, in their 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary show, a group of KNT kings staged a theatrical interpretation of Jonny McGovern the Gay Pimp’s “Soccer Practice.”

instrumental music break, he skillfully employs hip-hop dance with a strong physicality, lip-syncing to “Fuck them bitches [homo haters] with your gay pimp daddy.” When he lip-syncs to “We can’t marry, but it’s OK/We’d like to fuck too much anyway,” he does sexy waves to simulate sex, pushing and rolling his hip. While the music features a gay diva’s singing voice, Charleston’s dance moves turn into ballet through consecutive turning, jumping, and raising his leg high. Whereas the original music video of Jonny McGovern the Gay Pimp features a singing black drag queen diva for this segment, Chang choreographed it as a ballet scene to signify over-the-top gayness in the spectrum of Charleston’s gender displays. For the ending, Charleston elicits the audience’s response with the last refrain of the song: “Take it from your gay pimp daddy/Tell me what my name is (gay pimp!)/Who’s your (daddy!)?” He proclaims himself as an Asian gay pimp daddy, a lewd fag-preacher who blesses the audience with gender-fucking, sexual mirth, and non-assimilationist queer politics.

Chang exaggerates and hyperbolizes fagginess in order to disrupt the equation of maleness and masculinity and to demonstrate that Charleston’s effeminacy stems not from conforming to racial stereotype of Asian (gay) men but from his own free gender expression. With regard to emasculated Asian masculinity, Chang articulates his performance strategy:

My strategy, as a performer, is to have Charleston Chu address and embody his conflicts on stage. There are parts of him that very much would be seen as effeminate (“emasculated”), while there are parts of him that would be seen as just the opposite. He is a contradiction, and he invites the audience into the contradiction.

Just as Chang performs a male character in drag with his female body, Charleston disobeys the heteronormative mandate to practice the appropriate gender (manliness) predicated on his maleness. Charleston refuses to censor and restrain his gender expressions for fear of reinforcing the stereotype of emasculated Asian men. However, as Chang stresses, since Charleston recuperates his agency by embracing the negative stereotypes, Charleston's portrayal of extreme fagginess operates in the gap between social enforcement/prejudices and his own free choice.

Chang's performance strategy corresponds to Muñoz's concept of "disidentification" of the minority subject in that he reenacts racial and sexual stereotypes in order to deconstruct them. In his book, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance of Politics*, Muñoz defines disidentification as strategic negotiations between dominant culture and counter-culture:

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. [. . .] Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion [. . .] [i]t proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (11, 31)

The menacing power of disidentification resides in the fact that the marginalized throws back the imposed stereotypes toward the dominant culture by reappropriating them as a

nonconformist defiance. By performing stereotypes as a self-fabrication or character, the minority subject critically revises their “spoiled” identity (but still “within” and not “beyond” the dominant culture) and defamiliarizes the racial excess or stereotypes of themselves. Charleston shamelessly reclaims what white racist heteronormative culture denigrates in order to reuse the “raw material” from dominant ideology and to contest the “encoded message.” Chang/Charleston is stereotyped and confined by the dominant cultural logic, but at the same time, can rupture the socially inscribed codes by re/enacting them with a difference.

However, the parodic decoding or re/coding through disidentification inevitably confronts the limitations and dilemmas of performing racial and sexual stereotypes. Therefore, the refashioning of racial and sexual excess requires us to attend the ways in which disidentificatory performance is limited by the inherent risks. When I saw Chang’s live performance, although I was impressed by hir dance versatility and committed embodiment of the character, I was deeply concerned about the possibility of reproducing the racist emasculation of Asian men. I felt that even hir dance versatility could be overlooked and underestimated by the audience who might expect Asian fagness and by a cultural presumption of people of color as a native, exotic entertainer. Chang makes it clear that one of hir primary intentions was to be a strong Asian American solo performer who is capable of commanding the stage and captivating the audience through dance, which is hir forte. I admit that ze successfully actualized hir intention, but I was afraid that Chang’s messages might be dismissed or rendered illegible because an amusing dance piece in drag king performance is likely to be merely received as insubstantial entertainment.

In relation to using a white gay man's music, Chang's performance inspires me to interrogate the recurring conception of potent white masculinity and emasculated Asian masculinity within drag king cultures. When I saw hir performance in the IDKE showcase, I did not know the reference to the music and original artist. Later, during my research, I watched McGovern/the Gay Pimp's original music video, which reshaped my reception of hir performance. When I saw hir recorded performance on the IDKE DVD<sup>155</sup> again, I found that the white gay man's presence constantly lingers in and infiltrates Chang's performance while I see hir dance. The efficacy of hir performance is contingent on audiences' cultural competency to distinguish reconfirming racial stereotypes from critical self-fashioning or an individual preference for gender-fuck. Depending on individual audiences among mostly white audiences and if they are already familiar with McGovern's work, Chang's performance may fall into the danger of being read as "white assimilation" or an "imitation" of the white gay musician in opposition to hir purpose. Besides, Charleston's over-the-top fagginess may serve to enhance the emasculation of Chang's Asian (drag king) masculinity. Some audiences might think that because of the Asian body, Asian drag kings fail to represent adequate and convincing masculinity on stage. I understand that hir main goal as an Asian drag king is not to prove a competent masculinity or manliness against the presumed effeminacy of Asian men and queers. As ze emphasizes, Chang is more inclined to portray gender fluidity and to valorize hir ability of "being both feminine and masculine at the same time." However, to accomplish hir intention, Chang has to grapple with hir Asian body

---

<sup>155</sup> I am grateful to Allison Stelly (Cherry Poppins) in KNT for sending me a copy of the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE DVD.

which is already bounded by racial constructions of masculinity in the drag king stage and community where masculinity is privileged, measured, and sometimes emulated. In this light, Charleston's conflicts and contradictions strikingly resemble Chang's. Unlike white drag kings, Chang's (Charleston's) Asian body might overdetermine his performative gender performance.

Drag king shows take place in lesbian and queer subcultural venues, but the non-mainstream venue does not automatically promise audiences' critical consciousness of race and legibility of drag kings of color's performance strategies. As Hale points out, "Gender performativity, just as any other form of performativity, must occur within social constraints to be intelligible; it must be intelligible if it is to be efficacious; and if it is not efficacious it cannot succeed as performative" (62). Chang's Asian fagginess is a critical reminder of how important the audience's role is in making performance legible and hence efficacious. Also, the question remains how drag kings of color can obviate the danger of misreading and maximize the intelligibility of their performance through a more elaborate theatrical device and astute strategy.

Discussing race and masculinity in drag king performance, Halberstam focuses on the difference of a performance style between white kings and black kings, but makes little attempt to address the dilemmas and stakes of performing masculinities of color. Comparing the impenetrability of white masculinity to stylized masculinities of color, Halberstam notes:

[B]lack masculinity tends to be represented as always in excess of some white ideal of self-restraint. [. . .] White masculinity for the drag king has to be made visible and theatrical before it can be performed, while

masculinities of color have already been rendered as visible or invisible, theatrical or nontheatrical [sic] in their various relations to dominant white masculinities. [. . .] [b]lack masculinity seems fully available for repetition, impersonation, and appropriation. (1997: 107, 112, and 117)

While her point about black masculinity as excess in contrast with the “naturalness” of white masculinity is well taken, curiously, she overlooks how racial stereotypes operate in performances by drag kings of color. Furthermore, I am disturbed by Halberstam’s idea that whereas white drag kings find it more difficult to perform white masculinity due to the apparent non-theatricality of it, black masculinity proves easier to perform for black drag kings with more available styles. Rather, it seems to me that whereas a broader range of masculine types is available for white drag kings, the repertoire of black masculinity is already restricted by stereotypical roles. The performative excess and stylistic hyper-visibility of masculinity of color have been historically constructed by racial stereotypes. Thus, like Chang (Charleston)’s example, drag kings of color should vigilantly negotiate dominant codes of their racialized bodies and wrestle with more difficulties and obstacles to undercut racial stereotypes. Although drag kings of color endeavor to offer a positive image through cultural tribute, their performance always bears the danger of recalling negative connotations (Pauliny 235). Moreover, drag kings of color are pressured to provide “better representations” of their own racial groups and to be a spokesperson for their racial communities in their individual stage acts. However, Halberstam glosses over how racial stereotypes circumscribe performances by drag kings of color and affect audiences’ reception.

Another problem is that Halberstam is preoccupied with the dichotomy of parodying white masculinity and paying homage to black masculinity (especially, that of male black musicians). She claims that white drag king performance “revolves around parody and humor,” and black drag king performance has to do with homage or tribute (1998: 235). As Halberstam privileges blackness and uses it as representative for all people of color, she obscures the diversity of non-black masculinities of color in drag king performance. Since bodies of color are variously racialized according to divergent racist history and cultural baggage, racial and ethnic differences within drag kings of color must be taken into consideration when interrogating race and masculinity. Within Halberstam’s concept of white parody and black homage, there is no room to account for the thorny issues around the emasculation of Asian men and dominant representations of Asians as passive, asexual, and permanent foreigners. Besides, Halberstam fails to explore the possibilities of satire and parody by drag kings of color. Jana Evans Braziel asserts that drag kings of color also satirize and parody “the racist cultures invested in creating and perpetuating those pejorative tropes” in order to displace racial stereotypes (168). It is valid that drag kings of color rarely intend to make fun of masculinities of color, but it does not mean that they only imitate and appropriate the given masculine personae of color without regard for parodying the cultural gaze of racialized bodies and of circulated stereotypes.

Some drag king troupes choose a kind of agit-prop theatre style to engage with serious social issues and focus on education and political commentary rather than playfulness and amusement. By blending political theatre with queer gender performance, they have expanded themes and styles of drag king shows and injected

progressive politics in the drag king culture. When I saw my first IDKE showcase in 2004, I was struck by how deeply politicized the majority of the acts were. Since the showcase was held before the 2004 president election, many drag king troupes staged pieces to criticize the Bush administration and the Iraq war and to urge the audience to vote. For instance, drag king troupe DC Kings (Washington, DC) addressed racism, the Iraq-war, and conflicts and violence between black youth and white youth through a theatrical interpretation of American rap group Black Eyed Peas' song "Where is the Love?"<sup>156</sup> Compared to other drag king groups, DC Kings feature many black drag kings. Their racially mixed presence on stage made their performance about anti-racism more poignant, apt, and powerful. Wearing red church gowns and lip-syncing, they ask the audience and God, "Where is the love?" in the face of chilling grievances of injustice in the world such as racial discrimination, war, and prevalent hatred. In the course of their performance, they project the footage of Bush, Martin Luther King, the KKK, and devastating scenes in Iraq on the wide screen. As they remove their gowns, they racially divide themselves into black and white groups to portray fights and hostilities between black youth and white youth. Although they present an extreme form of racial conflicts between young folks in the streets, the racial antagonism also resonates with internalized racism and racial dynamics within the drag king culture and community. As they stop fighting and shake hands with each other, their aspiration for love, justice, and peace also calls for self-reflective thinking on racial reconciliation and cross-racial solidarity within the drag king community. In homage to Martin Luther King's ideas of

---

<sup>156</sup> I am grateful to Ken Vegas, the founder of DC Kings for letting me know the song and musician.

justice and peace, DC Kings earnestly embody and practice their message on stage through the black and white kings' ensemble performance.

Since drag kings bring diverse backgrounds and approaches to drag performance as social criticism, performances with politically-charged contents are not always positive and ideal. The delivery and representation of the political message tend to be more important rather than the quality or depth of the message itself. The ways in which they portray social problems are differently constituted by geographical locations, the politics of the performers, and the racial make-up of drag king troupes. For instance, I was deeply troubled by Cuntry Kings' (Durham, NC) dance piece in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, despite its strong feminist stance. Through modern dance with lip-syncing to the alternative rock band Cranberries' "Zombie," they encourage the audience to take actions against women's oppression. They delineate a process in which their silence and oppression are transformed into resistance and activism. During their performance, they project a collage of video footage related to women's oppression on the wide screen. However, whereas the performing drag kings on stage are all white, many women in the footage are women of color from the Third World. Even worse, whereas some pictures indicate specific issues such as rape, child sex trade, sex tourism, contraceptive rights, and violence against women, many pictures are so ambiguous – such as close-ups of Middle Eastern and South Asian women's faces – that they fail to reveal any contexts or issues at all. In this contrast between live, moving white bodies in conceptual dance and the still images of victimized women of color, it felt like material conditions of women's oppression in the Third World is textualized as a background or visual spectacle for white queer art. I wonder if they randomly collected all the images only to exemplify various

women's oppression and to display the horrific and miserable lives of women (primarily in the Third World), or if they were aware of and concerned with all the situations and issues involved in the pictures and created the footage with a distinct and deliberate intention. Through the performance, the possibility of the latter seems to be unlikely. I appreciate their effort to call attention to women's issues through a global lens and to awaken political consciousness to make changes. Yet drag kings should be more careful and thoughtful in using visual footage in their political performance.

To examine the efficacy of politically-charged drag king performance more in detail and to illustrate the progressive potentials of it, I want to closely read drag king troupes Chicago's Most Unwanted (CMU, Chicago, IL)'s and Houston Gendermyn (Houston, TX)'s performances in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase. Posing the critical question, "What/Who makes America?" CMU represents the exclusivity of white America, the discrimination against Mexican immigrants, and racism. As the Spanish song "Canción 187" by Mexican singer Juan Gabriel plays, Uncle Sam (played by white drag king Cody Las Vegas) stands on stage, wearing a white dress shirt and black boxers and sporting an arrogant and authoritative attitude. Next to him, a Latino man (Mexican-American Andres Del Los Santos) lip-syncs to the song, holding Uncle Sam's hat, while a white-Native American mixed tailor (T.C. Ryder)<sup>157</sup> and a Latino tailor (Mexican-American Xavier Onasis) measure Uncle Sam's body size to make his clothing. These tailors serve Uncle Sam (White America) by offering cheap labor through working on his

---

<sup>157</sup> To ask about T.C. Ryder's race/ethnicity, I contacted Cody Las Vegas via e-mail; I received his reply on Sep 18, 2007. However, in the performance, the audience may read her race as white. As an audience member, I also assumed that T.C. Ryder was white and did not recognize her part Native-Americanness.

costume, and one tailor entertains Uncle Sam by exhibiting his singing and dancing body of color.

Although the lip-syncing Latino man seemingly ingratiates himself with Uncle Sam through providing exotic amusements, he actually critiques white America and counters the cultural mandate to perform otherness through the challenging lyrics, which Uncle Sam does not understand. When I saw this performance, since I cannot speak Spanish and could not understand the lyrics, I did not know what the song was about and what the lip-syncing Latino tailor wanted to communicate through the song. Thus, owing to his delightful dance movements and the cheerful rhythm and melody of the music, I felt uncomfortable to see such a stereotypical representation of a Latino entertainer. However, after I talked with Xavier Onasis in CMU in person and via e-mail, I came to know that “Canción 187” is a song about an illegal immigrant’s experiences of racism and the troubles with immigration services.<sup>158</sup> The song says, “Anywhere you go, you will find way too much discrimination”; it describes a Mexican immigrant’s continuing frustration and disappointment while living in San Francisco, L.A., Arizona and in Texas. Proposition 187 was designed to deny public, social, educational, and health services to illegal immigrants in California in 1994. Using Gabriel’s song about Proposition 187, CMU adopts a Latino stereotype in order to upset the cultural expectation of Latinoness and to reveal the dark sides of white America. However, since there is no English translation of the lyrics on the screen, only Spanish-

---

<sup>158</sup> Gabriel sings in “Canción 187” that he “went to the U.S. illegally in search of work only to be mistreated, discouraged, and eventually come to the conclusion that they’re better off with their family in Mexico.” <<http://www.letxa.com/guiamigrante.php>>.

speaking audiences can notice CMU's smart rupture.

Certainly, the Latino man's lip-sync in Spanish partly obstructs the effects of their performance because of the language barrier, but lip-syncing to the Spanish song without an English translation may be an intentional strategy for Latino self-representation.

Discussing the use of non-English language and the presumption of English as a standard convention in identity-based theatre, Shannon Jackson contends:

[S]peech emerges as a powerful and strangely threatening mode of instantiating identity. [. . .] Thus, if a privileged person enters a space whose language is unfamiliar and *still* assumes that s/he is, as usual, being addressed, then such a person might not always capitulate to disorientation. Instead, she may decide that there is addressive intent in the non-address, that s/he is being intentionally left out, that being left out is *her* position. (194-195)

In opposition to the marginalization of Latina/os in real life, the use of the Spanish song can be construed as giving Spanish-speaking Latina/o audiences the privilege to read the deeper levels of the performance and to enjoy critical pleasures.<sup>159</sup> As a critique of the enforcement of English proficiency for immigrants, CMU may position non-Spanish speaking audiences into being left out in their address, celebrating Latino masculinity.

Besides, Cody Las Vegas remarks that CMU "wanted to turn the tables and make people

---

<sup>159</sup> Cody Las Vegas and Andres Del Los Santos figured that "since most people who attend IDKE are white, the majority of the audience would be lost with the song in Spanish." They also knew that there would be some people who would speak Spanish and understand the lyrics in Austin (Cody Las Vegas' e-mail to me on Sep 18, 2007).

think about what was being put on stage, instead of dismissing or liking an act based on the song itself.”<sup>160</sup>

Muñoz’s speculation on the “burden of liveness,” which is clearly relevant to immigration policy, provides a compelling account of the Latino man’s masquerade as a naïve entertainer in CMU. Muñoz writes:

This “burden of liveness” is a cultural imperative within the majoritarian public sphere that denies subalterns access to larger channels of representation, while calling the minoritarian subject to the stage, performing her or his alterity as a consumable local spectacle. [. . .] In post-Proposition 187 North America, the U.S. Latina/o is constantly scapegoated as the invader and outsider who is ruining the prosperity of “real” citizens. [. . .] The minoritarian subject is always encouraged to perform, *especially* when human and civil rights disintegrate. (182, 186, and 188)

The Latino man’s lip-synching to “Canción 187” condenses the ironic double-layers of a performing body of color subject to a discriminative immigration policy and recalcitrant racism in everyday life. In American immigration policy and racist ideology, Latina/os are seen as intruders who violate the secure boundary of white America and imperil the purity of the imaginary white nation. Simultaneously, they are summoned to perform a “consumable local spectacle” for white America only to “exist in *the moment*” with the burden of liveness that “structures temporality” (Muñoz 189). In this context, lip-

---

<sup>160</sup> His e-mail response to me on Sep 18, 2007.

syncing to “Canción 187” permits CMU to deform the Latino stereotype of the loud entertainer and to uncover the hidden reality behind the stereotype.

CMU foregrounds how white America is constituted by staging a skit about making clothing for Uncle Sam and dressing him. When the white-Native American mixed tailor hands red-striped white pants to Uncle Sam, he tries to give a rainbow flag (the symbol of queer community/politics),<sup>161</sup> but Uncle Sam refuses to take it. When the other Latino tailor dresses Uncle Sam in a blue jacket, he offers Uncle Sam a Puerto Rican flag, which is also refused. The lip-syncing tailor similarly fails to give a Mexican flag to Uncle Sam. The tailors are obviously outsiders of White America, but they work on the costume of Uncle Sam and dress white America. CMU proposes that white America is constructed and maintained by the exclusion of working-class queers and Latina/os. The process which Uncle Sam (hegemonic national authority) is created through the costume highlights the constructed nature of whiteness as well as dominant masculinity. Halberstam asserts that drag king culture produces a “counterpublic space where white and heteronormative masculinities can be contested” (2005:134). Nevertheless, it is not easy to particularize whiteness in drag king performance because whiteness in general is regarded as the human race with its assumed representativeness (Piontek 124). In many drag king performances, whiteness is subject to remain unmarked and un-raced. By juxtaposing Latino tailors’ labor with Uncle Sam, CMU disrupts the invisibility and unmarkability of whiteness and make his whiteness more

---

<sup>161</sup> The white-Native American mixed tailor grabs Uncle Sam’s penis while he measures the size of Uncle Sam’s legs. Uncle Sam is upset by that. This scene intimates that the tailor character is a gay man and suggests Uncle Sam’s homophobia.

seeable, which ultimately spotlights white America. Finally, as the lip-syncing tailor approaches Uncle Sam, he lip-syncs to “Ellos creen que dios es blanco (They think

God is white),” pointing to Uncle Sam and continues, “Y es mas moreno que yo (But He’s really darker than me).” Through the last line of the song, CMU draws attention to the whiteness of Uncle Sam and satirizes white supremacy in America. Then, three tailors raise the sign of “What/Who Makes America?” beside the fully dressed Uncle Sam, and invite the audience to critically engage with the question.

To directly address and clarify their political commentary in the theatrical interpretation of “Canción 187,” CMU begins a conversation between Uncle Sam and one Latino tailor (Xavier Onasis) without the lip-sync music. Among all the performances in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, only three troupes used their real voices in their acts: CMU, Houston Gendermyn, and Splendor and The Gender Fluids (Portland, OR). Since CMU’s speaking in their real voices is extraordinary, it captures the audience’s attention. The Latino tailor walks toward stage left, faces the audience, and asks: “When you look at me, what do you see? Do you see a brown person? [. . .] Do you wonder if I work as a grape picker, and have therefore stolen your income? [. . .] Do you want me here?” Although the tailor speaks to Uncle Sam, since he looks at the audience, the question is also directed at the audience. He implicates the audience in the contradictions of white America that Uncle Sam emblemizes. Interestingly enough, the Latino woman (Xavier Onasis) as a “Latino tailor” puts on facial hair (beard) on her face, but she does not lower her voice to hide her femaleness and to convincingly perform masculinity. Rather, she seriously delivers her lines with her natural voice. In so doing, she distances their piece from theatricality and playfulness in the first half.

Responding to the tailor's question, Uncle Sam points to the audience and answers, "I want you to learn English and be like the rest of us," recontextualizing Uncle Sam's catchphrase "I Want You" and revealing its hidden agenda. The Latino tailor raises another question, "Do you know me? Do you think you know me? Do you want me here? Uncle Sam explains, "I want you to be my token."<sup>162</sup> At this time, the tailor asks, again, looking at Uncle Sam, "I really need to know this. Do you want me here?" only to hear from Uncle Sam: "I want you to be a scapegoat for a failing economy." The tailor continues, "Your political correctness tells me yes. But do you want me here?" Uncle Sam replies, "I want you to be a wedge issue in the next political election."

To interrogate the question of "What/Who Makes America?" CMU shows that Latino immigrants are welcome to be in white America but only as tokens, scapegoats, and political pawns. In particular, during the back and forth conversations between the Latino tailor and Uncle Sam, the tailor's serial questions can be extended to prompt the audience to be introspective about white-dominant drag king cultures and communities as a part of white America. The tailor asks his last question, "Do you know where you come from?" and returns to the other tailors and Uncle Sam stage right. In the ending, the tailors take out folded national flags from Uncle Sam's pockets on his jacket and unfold them. CMU undresses white America and reminds us that America is a country of immigrants from all over the world. Explaining the metaphor of the flags, Cody Las Vegas articulates, "America didn't build itself, it used/uses every immigrant worker to

---

<sup>162</sup> The audience boos Uncle Sam and supports the tailor, applauding. But, as the tailor's subsequent words get more and more serious, the audience's response becomes quiet.

build, pick, maintain, construct, move, and every other action verb to make itself, yet, those immigrants are always stuffed away (in a pocket) and never thought of until it comes up in some political arena.”<sup>163</sup> CMU points out that white America is forgetful of the fact that Native Americans and Mexicans (the ancestors of the tailors) were the real owners of the land. Also, since transformer Cody Las Vegas plays Uncle Sam, inclusive, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and anti-racist America is reimagined on a queer body that transcends and transforms the gender binary.

Drag King troupe Houston Gendermyn (HG)’s performance in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase encapsulates how drag kings successfully implement drag king performance for political activism. HG commemorates prisoners who were killed via the death penalty and raises an objection to the unjust American prison system. HG’s piece was one of the most touching acts among all the performances at the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase. HG’s performance remains vivid and powerful to me even when writing on it one year later. HG’s work marks a groundbreaking drag king performance in many respects. Drag king shows are traditionally entertainment-oriented, and playfulness and humor are dominant aspects of drag king performance. Yet HG breaches the convention in order to educate the audience and to participate in serious social criticism. Their performance is a paradigmatic example of an appropriate and efficacious usage of visual footage and audio mix. Initially, I thought the reason for my intense and visceral reception was their performance versatility to embody the characters, their political optimism, and brilliant theatrical choices. However, after I interviewed Kit Kat, a member of HG, I learned

---

<sup>163</sup> His e-mail response to me on Sep 18, 2007.

that their amazing performance was not only about the issue of technical performance quality on stage, but rather, about their embodiment of political activism in everyday life.

HG's performance was an extension of political commitment and practice off-stage concerning the death penalty and Frances Newton's case. Newton was executed on Sep 14, 2005 in the Walls Unit,<sup>164</sup> in Huntsville, Texas, on a charge of murdering her husband and her children for insurance money. She was the first black woman executed by the state of Texas since 1853, and despite questions regarding her guilt, she was put to death without a fair trial or competent counsel. Kit Kat covered the execution of Newton for Free Speech Radio News and the local Pacifica station KPTF. She says, "It was a life changing experience to be outside the Walls Unit while a human being who many many many people thought was innocent, was murdered. It was very important to honor France's memory. [. . .] The audio you heard [in the drag king show] was three snippets from different points during the protest of the execution."<sup>165</sup> According to Kit Kat's recollection, due to the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans, racial tension was high, and protesters felt raw and were very angry in face of the execution of Newton. Participating in the protest, she recorded the sounds, speeches, and chanting full of anger, desperation, and grief, and HG used the recorded sounds in their performance.

HG uses country/rock & roll singer/songwriter Johnny Cash's "San Quentin" for their lip-sync music to stage the inhuman situation of inmates and the group's objection to the death penalty. San Quentin is a State prison in San Francisco in CA. Cash played this song in front of inmates on Feb 24, 1969 at San Quentin, and the song was

---

<sup>164</sup> The Walls Unit Huntsville is a building in the Texas Prison system where the executions take place.

<sup>165</sup> Kit Kat's e-mail response to me on Oct 31, 2006.

released on the live concert album *Johnny Cash at San Quentin* (Columbia Records, 1969). The song “San Quentin” describes how San Quentin destructs souls and hearts of prisoners and scares them.<sup>166</sup> Kit Kat enacts Cash’s rebellious and edgy outlaw persona as a kind of cultural tribute to Cash on the grounds that he was also critical of the American prison system and had much affection and empathy for prisoners. His nickname, “Man in Black,” derives from his distinctive choice to always wear dark clothing on stage. Cash explains why he insists on black costume in his song “Man in Black”:

I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down, living in the hopeless, hungry side of town. [. . .] I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime. [. . .] I wear the black in mourning for the lives that could have been. [. . .] I wear it for the thousands who have died. [. . .] I will try to carry off a little darkness on my back, till things are brighter. I’m the Man in Black.<sup>167</sup>

Cash’s affinity and bond with social minorities, especially with prisoners, correspond to HG’s criticism of the death penalty and the American prison system. Halberstam observes that while “many of the white drag kings poke gentle fun at white masculinity,” black drag kings try to produce “close replications of the performers they imitate” as homage to the black artists (1997: 120). Contrary to Halberstam’s generalization, although all the performers in HG’s piece are white or white-mixed looking whites, Kit

---

<sup>166</sup> “San Quentin” includes the lyrics such as “San Quentin, I hate every inch of you. [. . .] San Quentin, may you rot and burn in hell. [. . .] And may all the world regret you did no good.”

<sup>167</sup> “Man in Black” from the album *Man in Black* (Columbia Records, 1971).

Kat borrows a somber and subversive white Southern masculinity from Cash without any parodic approach. It is meaningful to employ and reclaim a defiant white Southern image in contrast to general preconceptions of conservative, Southern whiteness. After all, Newton's life was sacrificed in the state of Texas, and HG is a drag king troupe from Houston, TX. Using Cash's song, HG establishes organic connections between their positioned locality, the issue that they address (Newton's case and the death penalty), and the music. Moreover, Kit Kat politicizes the song in a new, queer context by playing Cash with a female body.

As a queer Johnny Cash/Man in Black, Kit Kat appears on stage wearing a black cowboy shirt, black pants, and a guitar strapped around her neck. She frames HG's San Quentin piece through her introduction without music. She says in her real voice, "To drag means a lot of things to a lot of kings, but for me it has always been a political expression. Tonight, I wanna tell you a story about life and death in the United States' prison system. Some of the images that you're about to see may upset you. And they should." Although she impersonates Cash, her commentary on drag king performance and political activism suggest that her intention is not to seamlessly imitate Cash or to merely entertain the audience.<sup>168</sup> Since many drag king acts are performed in queer bars, dance clubs, or other nightlife entertainment venues, the performer/troupes that deal with overwhelming political issues may receive a cold response from the audience. Besides, by using her real voice, Kit Kat does not hide her femaleness in impersonating

---

<sup>168</sup> In their troupe blog, HG clarifies their three main purposes, "1. to educate and empower a larger genderqueer community and its allies; 2. to advocate for social justice; 3. to push the limits of performance art." <<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=110896894>>.

Cash, and states her opinion about drag kinging as herself, not as Cash. Her female voice might obstruct the verisimilitude of the (male) character, but she prioritizes the educational function of drag king performance for social change and strongly encourages the audience to engage with problems of the death penalty.

As the song “San Quentin” plays, HG performs a scene in prison where a new inmate comes in, and another inmate is executed, while visual footage is projected on the wide screen on stage. While Kit Kat as Cash lip-syncs to the song, playing air-guitar on stage left, the audience sees a young white inmate wearing an orange jump suit read a book, sitting on a chair on center stage. A white police officer takes a mug shot of another young white inmate and makes him change his clothing. When the new inmate turns his back toward the audience, the words “State Property” on the back of his prisoner uniform shirt evoke the notion that inmates’ lives are like a disposable property of the state. Behind the scene, the audience sees pictures of prison buildings as well as desperate and hopeless prisoners. Since the two inmates’ faces, full of despair and fear and difficult emotions, resonate with the pictures of real prisoners on the screen, the staged scene and the visual footages along with the song “San Quentin” create a synergy with each other and articulate intense feelings of the monstrosity of the death penalty. After a woman visits an inmate to see her family member (or lover) one last time, a white executor wearing a brown suit and cowboy hat covers the inmate’s face with a black hood to prepare for the execution. Another inmate is reading a book, waiting for his turn, which denotes that the execution of inmates is normalized – a mechanical process.

At this point, thoughtfully enough, HG stops the scene and freezes (including Kit Kat/Cash) so as not to distract the audience’s attention to the video projection on the

screen and the audio mix. The visual footage contains portraits of executed prisoners including Aileen Wuornos<sup>169</sup> and Newton's mug shot, crosses in cemeteries, and horrible, abject scenes of police abuse and cruel treatment of prisoners. Also, it features pictures of switches connected to an electric chair, a high stonewall of a prison, and a death gurney. During the video projection, the audience hears an audio mix that Kit Kat recorded from the protest against Newton's execution. A woman (death penalty activist Sherry Clausell) announces, "The governor just denied. This is America." Another woman (local radio activist/feminist scholar Hitaji Aziz) shouts, "Let her go. [. . .] You don't have to sit in a prison system for 18 years. [. . .] No more loneliness. Go on baby. Be free! Be free!"<sup>170</sup> Aziz adds:

They want to set an example, for a racist system. They want to kill a mother. They want to kill a daughter. [. . .] They want to kill you. They want to kill me. [. . .] As long as you are poor, as long as you are of color, as long as you have no empowerment, you're apt to go to prison. It could be you tomorrow.

A lot of sounds of crying and screaming overlap with the statements of protest. Since the audio mix vividly conveyed anger, desperation, and urgency on the spot, many spectators were overwhelmed and electrified by what they heard.

As HG's performance was initially inspired by Newton's case, it seems that HG was particularly concerned with the racist prison system and wanted to mirror a critique

---

<sup>169</sup> White working-class woman Wuornos killed seven men who she claimed raped or attempted to rape her as self-defense while she was working as a prostitute; she was put to death on Oct 9, 2002.

<sup>170</sup> I got all the names and their exact statements from Kit Kat. I am very grateful for her support and for sharing her experiences with me.

of it in their performance. Most of the displayed portraits of prisoners and inmates in their visual footage were people of color, and especially, Aziz's last words in the audio mix reveal the extent to which the American prison system is more disadvantageous to people of color and the working-class. In "Frances Newton Died for Bush's Sins," comparing Newton's case to white female killer Karla Faye Tucker's case, Dave Lindorff indicates that Newton received less media attention because of her race (Lindorff). Furthermore, finding an analogy between the classist and racist administration's response to the Katrina disaster in New Orleans and Newton's case, he asserts that Newton "is yet another victim of Hurricane Katrina" (ibid). Nevertheless, since what the audience sees live on stage is the white inmates, and HG performs the scene without any speech (except for Kit Kat's introduction), I wonder if the audience clearly could get the message. If the audience does not recognize the picture of Newton and does not realize that the audio mix was taken from the demonstration against the execution of her, HG's criticism on the racist and classist prison system is not explicitly foregrounded.

Whereas HG still illuminates the social constructions of masculinity through the costume and socially scripted gestures, they are eager to be loyal to the characters and they strive to infuse their performance with a sort of authenticity in order to actualize their performance intentions and to effectively deliver the political themes. Kit Kat's impersonation of Cash, despite her cultural tribute to him, exposes the stylized artifice of masculinity. The performances of the male characters of the police officer, executor, and inmates in drag highlight how masculinities are differently performed by diverse social positions through the uniforms and the expected (or assigned) roles to the social costume. For example, the police officer does not display any emotional vulnerability

and maintains a strict and deadpan face as an agent of the authority of the juridical system, keeping his posture straight. Unlike many drag kings who appropriate cool and stylish masculine styles on stage, HG drag kings play working-class inmates in addition to a police officer and an executor, none of whom are attractive or hilarious characters. By performing the inmates' abject and powerless masculinities, they demystify the dominant notions of maleness/masculinity wed to "power, legitimacy, and privilege" (Halberstam 1998: 2). HG's bringing of off-stage politics to the stage by inserting the real-life sounds of anti-death penalty activism carves out an alternative performance style that integrates activism and theatricality in drag king performance.

In addition to the appropriation of gay sexuality and personas and political theatre to disseminate propaganda, many drag kings are interested in deconstructing and reinterpreting popular culture. Representatively, drag king troupe KNT (Austin, TX) queerly stages a scene from the musical *Annie* (1977)/the film *Annie* (1982) in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase.<sup>171</sup> They perform the scene "It's the Hard-Knock Life" where young orphan girls describe their miserable lives in the orphanage during the absence of the owner, Miss Hannigan. Drawn from the intimacy between orphan girls and the potential for their resistance, KNT recasts the orphan girls as closeted lesbian drag kings in black men's suits who neglect the duty of cleaning and furtively imagine their subversion, lip-syncing to Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal," in the middle of the song "It's the Hard-Knock Life." The orphan girls are transformed into break-dancing

---

<sup>171</sup> As I articulate in the introduction of this chapter, I do not conduct a thick description of all performance examples so that I can pay more attention to select pieces that pertain to significant and thorny issues of drag king performance and I can give more space to closely read and discuss them. I leave out a detailed description and close performance analysis of KNT's work and briefly deal with it to illustrate queer deconstruction of popular culture.

genderqueers who enjoy their masculinity, and in so doing, KNT makes an analogy between the disciplines and rules of the orphanage and heteronormative gender and gender policing. Similarly, KNT reenvisions a scene of the film *Cry-Baby* by John Waters (1990) where a wealthy good girl (Allison) appeals for her boyfriend Wade/Cry-Baby (a lower-class juvenile delinquent)'s release from the prison through the song "Please, Mr. Jailer."<sup>172</sup> KNT queers the cross-class heterosexual romance as butch-femme lesbian love through their drag king rendition of "Please, Mr. Jailer." Unlike the original film, Allison and other femmes obtain the prison keys to set their boy friends free by seducing a police officer and then imprisoning him. As masculine (female) drag kings play the male juvenile delinquents in prison, KNT reclaims the Drapes (Wade/Cry-Baby's group, lower-class and rebellious boys in the film) as gender outlaws who are abnormalized and punished by heteronormative gender system, but resist gender norms.

Drag king project group Butchballet's (Oakland, CA) performance in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase redefines butchness as well as complicates established gender codes by brilliantly fusing the gendered genres of ballet and the Western film.<sup>173</sup> Butchballet consists of four white drag kings: Kentucky Fried Man, Jake Danger, Damien Danger, and Jeff Stroker. In the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE program, Butchballet writes, "the Butchballet stands en pointe to bring you graceful poise and powerful packages. Hey, ballet ain't for sissies!" (27). Within lesbian and gay communities, it has been traditionally believed that while gay men love ballet, butch lesbians (and masculine female-born genderqueers)

---

<sup>172</sup> It was performed on Apr 21, 2006, at the club Elysium for KNT's 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

<sup>173</sup> I am very grateful to Jake Danger for explaining and contextualizing Butchballet's performance via e-mail.

do not dance or are not supposed to dance or are poor at dancing. Valuing the usefulness of drag king performance for butches, genderqueer filmmaker Silas Flipper says, “[B]utches don’t often let themselves dance. There’s something very stiff about being butch [. . .] [b]ecause to dance as a butch is very difficult. [. . .] [b]ut being a Drag King does help butches loosen up a bit and expand” (qtd. in Volcano and Halberstam 131). Considering the equation of dancing and femininity and traditional butches’ reluctance to dance, the drag king stage offers an innovative site to parade and to celebrate dancing masculinities. Furthermore, *Butchballet* expands the dance repertoire of drag kings by adopting ballet, arguably the most feminine of dance genres.

*Butchballet* begins with ballet bar (barre) exercises, using chairs on stage, and then turns into Western cowboys doing ribbon gymnastics in a hilarious collision with incongruent gender codes. Three big butch ballet dancers, who wear ballet tights and hooded jackets instead of white tutus and pink toe shoes, turn, do pliés (bend their knees), gracefully raise and stretch their arms, and touch the floor with their toes (“pointe tendu”) in time to classical ballet music by Verdi, Handel, and Stravinsky. As another small butch dancer wearing a black cowboy hat joins the three big butches’ rehearsal, they take off their hooded jackets and reveal black cowboy shirts with red glitter and sheer (see-through) sleeves. In conjunction with the butch drag kings’ ballet, this costume manifests a gender mixture of masculinity and femininity. Then, the music transitions to the main theme of the film *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966) by Sergio Leone, and *Butchballet* intentionally makes their bulging crotches conspicuous by lowering their bodies and setting their legs apart. With this gesture, they appear to suggest that doing ballet does not undermine their masculinity and diminish their

phalluses. On the contrary, they keep elegant ballet movements and move sideways with their arms crossed in front of one another, reminiscent of “the Dance of the Little Swans” of Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. Butchballet undercuts heroic, white macho masculinity in the Western film and displaces it with butch “Clint Eastwood”-style dancing ballet. By simultaneously enacting ballet and Western cowboy mannerisms with their queer bodies, they parody “gendered presumptions of high, elite art and this “popular, lowbrow” genre (Dolan).<sup>174</sup> Finally, they wear black cowboy hats and spin and wave gymnastic ribbons for the finale of their performance.

Although many drag kings wear dildos or other prosthetic material in their performances, Butchballet’s packing yields significant gender-fucking effects in their cowboy ballet piece. In “Taking on the Phallus,” Colleen Lamos discusses the implications of the dildo as a “put-on” accessory:

The dildo appropriates the symbolic power with which the penis had traditionally been endowed and transfers it onto a nonanatomical, commercially manufactured part. Moreover, the overt artificiality of the dildo reflexively denaturalizes the penis-as-phallus, revealing the penis as only one among many possible phallic symbols. [. . .] [t]he dildo is threatening and fascinating because it transgresses the boundary between women-identified lesbianism and male-identified or cross-gendered practices. (104,109)

While Butchballet reclaims their phallic power and highlights the artificiality of

---

<sup>174</sup> Her e-mail correspondence with me on Oct 8, 2007

masculinity through packing, they neither enact a heroic masculinity of Western cowboys nor embody hyper-femininity of weak and skinny ballerinas. By underscoring the distance between the phallus and penis and by foregrounding their packing as a “simulacrum (an object circulating without origin),” they “ironize the prescriptive constructs of femininity and masculinity” (Reich 259, 261). Instead of reins or whips to ride on a horse, guns, and cowboy boots, Butchballet wears wrist warmers and waves gymnastic ribbons. Their packing and facial hair are the props not to imitate a gun-man in the wild West firing shots on a horse, but to celebrate and flesh out gender hybridity and multiplicity. Jake Danger, a member of Butchballet, articulates that “[t]he number was really not “butch” at all. Yet we were playing with the contradictions of effeminate ballet dancing and butch bravado of the western standoff.”<sup>175</sup> For the duration of their performance, diverse gender cues are displayed in constant disjunctures: their short hair cuts, ballet dancing, facial hair, ballet tights, cowboy shirts and hats, gymnastic ribbons, and packing. Troubling the gender binarism, they contest the dominant notions of gender as fixed, unitary, and coherent.

Butchballet’s performance also comments on the issue of body size and challenges inner gender rules within queer communities. Like Butchballet, a drag king performance “becomes a text that not only engages existing discourses, but that also has the potential to disrupt or amend those discourses” (Pauliny 229). The presence on stage of three big performers and another short performer reverses the visual pleasure of seeing normalized bodies of tall and skinny ballerinas. Besides, through dancing butch

---

<sup>175</sup> Jake Danger’s e-mail to me on Aug 21, 2007.

ballet with gymnastic ribbons, they revise the conventional understanding of gendered dance styles in drag king culture. Whereas many drag kings do hip-hop or break-dancing to emphasize their masculinity, Butchballet pushes the limits of butchness by forging a delicate and elegant masculinity through ballet.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how drag kings represent various masculinities and engage in different stakes and tasks in performing queer genders according to their race, ethnicity, sexuality, geographical locations, and respective political standpoints. In addition, I have explored the ways in which drag kings stage and mark the intersections of masculinity and other social vectors through music, costume, gestures, and persona/character choices. Divergent performance styles and strategies by different drag king troupes and solo performers illustrate that there are multiple masculine genders, as well as myriad contradictions and dilemmas within the drag king community. In the following conclusion, I evaluate the opportunities and limitations of drag king performance and suggest further questions to be explored by critics and performers alike.

Drag king performance offers the possibility and potential to explore queer masculinities and to stage social criticism and political statements by performing queer genders. Drag king shows allow for a great deal of freedom of expression in terms of subject matters and themes because drag king acts generally take place in queer subcultural venues and are presented for queer audiences. Drag kings expose the constructed nature of gender and experiment with queer genders and gender fluidity through theatrical performances of masculinity. In disrupting heteronormative gender,

drag kings rejoice in lesbian/queer desire and promote counternormative sexuality.<sup>176</sup> They broaden the scope of gender variance and elaborate and reconfigure queer ideas of gender and sexuality through performance. Like CMU and HG, some drag kings extend the drag king stage to political intervention for social justice beyond recreational pursuits. Many drag king troupes reappropriate popular culture in order to counter dominant representations and to animate queer imagination and subjectivity. To activate different intentions and purposes, drag kings bring humor, erotic pleasure, parody, homage, media criticism, and political commentary to the stage in diverse theatrical forms.

Many drag kings – The Dangers & Noah Boyz and Cuntry Kings – invalidate the conflation of misogyny and masculinity/male identification and weave feminist politics into their drag king acts by performing feminist masculinities. Julie Applegate, Donna Jean Troka (both IDKE co-founders), and other members of the Columbus queer community were graduates of the Ohio State University Women’s Studies masters program when they were planning on an academic conference for the first IDKE, which indicates that feminism was incorporated into IDKE from the beginning (Troka). Thomas Piontek notes that most of H.I.S. Kings (Columbus, Ohio) are “(current or former) students of Women’s Studies, which certainly contributes to the theoretical sophistication of their shows” (142).<sup>177</sup> In the documentary *Drag Kings on Tour* (Dir. Sonia Slutsky, 2004), one older lesbian spectator at the 2004 National Women’s Music Festival expresses her suspicions of misogyny and male empowerment in drag king

---

<sup>176</sup> Some drag kings identify as lesbian or dyke, and others identify as queer. Genderqueer identity is not equal to transgender identity or male-identification.

<sup>177</sup> The drag king troupe H.I.S. Kings played a key role in the foundation of IDKE.

shows, but another older lesbian hypothesizes that just as lesbians were radicals in the 1970's feminism, drag kings are the "radicals" of their time. As new feminist radicals, drag kings prove that "drag is about subverting gender binaries, not rejecting women" or threatening feminism (Lo).

Despite many achievements and possibilities of drag king performance, the formal conventions of drag king performance yield many constraints and difficulties in creating an act. Since drag kings lip-sync to songs without speaking in their own voices, they rely considerably on the lyrics of the music for their message. Accordingly, lip-syncing may fail to clarify drag kings' intentions and obscure their ideas. Since what draws audiences' attention is visual presentation (dancing/theatrical skits and individual performers' gender display or impersonation) on stage, it is not easy for the audience to concentrate on the quickly passing lyrics of loudly played music while seeing the stage. On the contrary, the Sunday brunch cabaret event at the 8th IDKE featured live singing, spoken word, and conventional solo performance. Though a deviation from the standard drag king format, I did not feel that hearing their real voices interrupted the credibility of their embodied and performed masculinity.<sup>178</sup> While drag kings typically capitalize on the artificiality and fluidity of gender, ironically, audiences tend to judge the quality of acting by the degree of "realness" – how the performer is able to create a convincing illusion of the character s/he portrays (Surkan 167). Some drag

---

<sup>178</sup> The Sunday brunch event (which is also a wrap-up/farewell event) is held in a more casual atmosphere and permits more time flexibility because it has far fewer performers than the main IDKE showcase. One might say that since a lot of drag king troupes and solo drag kings perform in the main showcase, a strict time limitation should be kept, and hence, more drag kings prefer traditional lip-sync to speech in an experimental form. Nevertheless, the question remains why drag kings insist on lip-syncing in the IDKE showcase; an exception to this pattern is the drag king group Momma's Boyz & The Groove (San Francisco, CA) who did live rapping and singing in the 6<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase.

kings might think that the female voice disables the illusion of male character because it is an explicit female marker. Similarly, non-female-identified drag kings with high voices might not want to use speech. Although I acknowledge that lip-syncing is a unique tradition central to drag king performance, I hope that more drag kings will consider using their voices in order to augment the efficacy of their performance.

Another challenge of drag king performance is that drag kings must convey complex ideas and messages within the short length of an act. It is hard for drag kings to delve into an issue in depth and to fully address complicated and nuanced meanings with short numbers. This problem extends beyond IDKE events; I have seen many performances by KNT in Austin, but the length per skit and lip-sync format in the local venue is almost as same as in the IDKE showcases. If I had not attained information about the context and background of the performances through my interviews, I could not have figured out what Charleston Chu's strategy and intention was in "Lookin' Cute/ Feelin' Cute" piece and would not have known that HG's "San Quentin" piece was inspired by Frances Newton's case. Usually, performers in conventional theatre venues have enough time to excavate themes and metaphors throughout a performance. In contrast, the legibility of dense themes and diverse cultural/political references in drag king performance is inherently reduced because of the short length.

Due to these formal restrictions, audiences' cultural competency is more crucial in drag king performance than many other theatrical forms. The 8th IDKE showcase especially prompted me to think about the efficacy of self-representation of color through drag king performance and audiences' cultural competency. The black drag king troupe Nappy Grooves (Oakland, CA) performed a politically aggressive black hip-hop

masculinity in their dance piece about African diaspora, lip-syncing the song “I’m a African” by Dead Prez in the 8th IDKE showcase. They wore t-shirts with a shape of the African continent and waved the Pan-African flag (Black Liberation Flag)<sup>179</sup> as an emblem of black pride and African nationalism. The song says, “Nigga the red is for the blood in my arm. The black is for the gun in my palm. And the green is for the tram that grows natural [. . .] I’m an African, never was an American. Blacker than black.” Owing to the refrain “I’m African” along with the rest of the lyrics, the audience may register that this piece honors African pride, but I wonder how many spectators (mostly non-black) understood the significance and symbolism of the Red, Black, and Green Flag. In the workshop of Performing Blackness at the 8th IDKE, Bill Dagger (a member of Nappy Groove) explained that the group meticulously and carefully choreographed every gesture and dance move with distinct intentions. Yet, in the performance, there was no way to make sense of “which move signifies what,” unless the audience already has knowledge to read the signals of their specific gestures and dance moves. It seemed to me that most audiences took the performance as entertainment except for the counteractive lyrics, as they enjoy an amusing hip-hop dance performance and music.

Nappy Grooves’ example also brings to mind the debates on racial authenticity vs. racial performativity (by a drag king’s cross-racial performance versatility). In the 8th IDKE showcase, white drag king Max Voltage in Übergay Cabaret (Portland, OR)

---

<sup>179</sup> The Pan-African flag consists of three equal horizontal bands colored red, black, and green, signifying blood, black people, and African homeland, respectively. It was adopted by Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), and the UNIA-ACL members in 1920. <<http://www.unia-acl.org/history/flagstor.htm>>.

showed his excellent dancing skill, lip-syncing the song “Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)” by C+C Music Factory.<sup>180</sup> Owing to his whiteness and performance to black music and a conventionally black dance form (hip-hop/break dancing), Max Voltage’s dance technique and performance ability are more spotlighted, which serves to exhibit a more flavored and stylish (white) masculinity. Yet how does the audience clearly distinguish the difference between Nappy Grooves’ political embodiment of African nationalism and Max Voltage’s entertainment through cultural appropriation? Does the audience think that while Nappy Grooves’ hip-hop dance performs what they “are” because they are black, Max Voltage’s talented dance accentuates a cross-racial fluidity and an individual capability? Are all drag king dance pieces destined to be dismissed as entertainment in the mode of “Let’s have fun!”? Since dance ability varies in an individual performer, it is possible for a white drag king to do hip-hop dance or break-dancing better, without the embodiment of blackness, than a black drag king. How can black drag kings mark black embodiment in a dance number and still communicate references to black culture and politics with audiences?

Drag king performance enables drag kings of color to enhance the visibility of genderqueers of color through their self-representation and celebration of their own racial/ethnic/cultural heritage and community. Yet, as in Nappy Grooves’ example, the issue of accessibility and translation is one of the dilemmas and burdens that drag kings of color encounter in performing masculinities of color. How can drag kings of color

---

<sup>180</sup> C+C Music Factory is a dance-pop/house group. “Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)” is on the album, *Gonna Make You Sweat* (Sony, 1990), which features black rapper Freedom Williams and black R&B singer Martha Wash.

benefit from their self-representation as a cultural exchange and communication? How can they make their own cultural codes intelligible to white audiences (or even to audiences of color)? How do white spectators educate themselves to learn from drag kings of color's performance and non-white cultures and politics? Can performance by drag kings of color motivate white audiences to realize their ignorance of non-white cultures and to encourage them to reflect on white centrism? Is it adequately efficacious only if the performance is meaningful for the performers of color themselves, considering the under-representation and invisibility of people of color in the white-dominant queer culture? Should drag kings of color always address and be mindful of white audiences for the legibility of their performance? In the Race Discussion Panel at the 8th IDKE, many drag kings of color said that they are fed up with educating and teaching white people, which illustrates frustrating racial tension and division within the drag king culture. The unquestioned white ignorance and indifference of non-white cultures and drag kings of color's repulsion to being asked to translate remain deadlocked.

While interviewing several drag kings, I have learned that some performers, who I assumed were white, were actually white-mixed persons or multi- or bi-racial persons who do not identify as white. Through my critical conversation with a few drag kings, I was inspired to muse on the erasure of multi- or bi-raciality on the drag king stage. Particularly, Kit Kat in Houston Gendermyn articulates her trouble with the dominant racial categorization:

In my study of the history of the South, I have found that most families that settled here more than 100 years ago (which mine did) have some African American lineage as a function of slavery and all of its horrible

layers. I have Cherokee Indian in my lineage, and my last name is German/Jew. I have English, Irish, and Russian ancestry too. I'm a mutt! [. . .] I get the privilege of being "white" and I certainly pass as "white," but [. . .] I hate being taken as a member of what was the "master race" for so long, because I want to scream, "I'm MORE than that! It doesn't define me!"<sup>181</sup>

Despite their refusal of white identification, many multi- or bi-racial drag kings who look white (including Kit Kat) pass as white for the audience. Unless they look black or Latino or Asian, they are subject to be "un-raced" as white. This unclaimed racial hybridity may partly support the predominant visibility of white masculinity in drag king performance. How can multi- or bi-racial drag kings emphasize their non-whiteness and multi or bi-racial masculinities? How can they make explicit their bi-or multi-raciality to evidence that race is socially constructed and performative? In the 6th and 8th IDKE showcases and in monthly shows by KNT in Austin, I have not seen a performance that concerns multi- or bi-raciality and problematizes the given racial categorization predicated on the exclusive purity of a single race. Usually, drag kings impersonate characters or play an ensemble role in a theatrical skit; they lip-sync and pantomime, but rarely perform as themselves or explore their own personal stories. Thus, whereas multi- or bi-racial drag kings (who pass as white) get the privilege of being white on stage, their other racial identities become effaced and negated. However, performance of racial hybridity will contribute to undercutting essentialized notions of race and

---

<sup>181</sup> Kit Kat's e-mail response to me on Sep 22, 2007.

racialized masculinities in drag king shows.

As I indicated in my analysis of The Dangers' & Noah Boyz's "Promises, Promises," the participation of transsexuals and transgenders in drag king performance is beneficial in raising a critical consciousness about transphobia within queer communities. Trans-identification can be a multiple and conflicting subjectivity, and there are a vast range of identities under the umbrella of transgender. Therefore, performance of transgenderism can enrich masculine gender variance of female-born/assigned people and offer useful insights to revisit previous understandings of the body, sex, and gender. Yet in spite of the increasing numbers of transgender-identified drag kings in the drag king scene, curiously, transgender issues are not frequently staged in drag king performance.<sup>182</sup> Since many drag kings wear facial hair, do packing, and bind their chest, there is no visual cue to discern butch lesbian drag kings from transsexual/transgender drag kings. Unless a drag king act marks a transgender subject and takes up a specific transgender issue, the representation of trans identity/politics is rendered marginalized and invisible. I am not suggesting that trans drag kings should only perform transgender characters or always address transgender issues and politics. But I continued to be concerned with how we can redress the under-representation of transgenders and grapple with internalized transphobia within queer communities through performance.

Certainly, the labels of transgender/transsexual/genderqueer overlap and

---

<sup>182</sup> In the Sunday brunch cabaret at the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE, transgender performance artist Scott Turner Schofield performed an excerpt from *Debutante Balls* (2004). It was not a drag king show in lip-sync, but a conventional solo performance consisting of autobiographical monologues. "By describing himself as he attended the three balls" at ages 16, 18, and 21 (as a lesbian, a radical feminist, and a trans man), Schofield discusses what it means to be a white transgender in the American South (Epstein).

interchange with each other, depending on an individual, and the line to make a clear distinction between female-born genderqueers sometimes becomes blurry. In *Female Masculinity*, suggesting a productive continuum in response to the butch/FTM border wars, Halberstam argues:

Many subjects, not only transsexual subjects, do not feel at home in their bodies. [. . .] There are real and physical differences between female born men who take hormones, have surgery, and live as men and female-born butches who live some version of gender ambiguity. But there are also many situations in which those differences are less clear than one might expect. [. . .] [m]any bodies are gender strange to some degree or another. (1998:153)

Although it is true that any classification or categorization is insufficient to configure gender diversity and overlooks the continuum of gender dysphoria, it seems to me that one of the key difference among female-born genderqueers is whether they identify as female or male. Some genderqueers maintain their female identities, but some FTM transgenders want to transform their female bodies through chest surgery or hormone injections. Their contrasting perceptions of the female body differentially mold their masculinities and lead to different experiences and existences in their personal, social, and legal lives. While Halberstam universalizes gender dysphoria as a common ground between female-born gender variants, she equivocates what the “real and physical differences” between them are. How can transgender/transsexual drag kings manifest their male identification or non-female identification, unlike “female” masculinity in drag? Do some trans drag kings find it meaningless and unfruitful to make a distinction

between trans masculinity and female masculinity? How can transgenders' particular experiences in material reality "be seen and heard" in their drag king performance?

Performing multiple and heterogeneous trans-identifications and practices will innovate drag king performance by multiplying queer genders and pushing against the rigid categories of gender.

In the spoken word piece "Gender Game," Alix Olson and Neeve proclaim genderqueers as "Deconstruction Workers" who make revolution toward a gender evolution (Olson). Neeve writes in another spoken word piece, "hot like coals," "A Drag [sic] king is smart enough to revise the internalized." I believe drag kings can best become revolutionary deconstruction workers not by merely lip-syncing such a declaration but by actively scrutinizing the social contradictions inherent in drag king performance, and stripping queer communities' internalized dominant ideologies of racism and transphobia.

## **Conclusion: Toward the Critical Artfulness of Gender**

Inspired by and owing to Halberstam's theorization of female masculinity, I have sought to amplify her ideas in queer performance studies with an emphasis on the intersectionality of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. I argue that Shaw, shorb, D'Lo, and drag kings "adopt and transmute the many available codes of masculinity" (Rubin 469) in different venues according to their gender identities, politics, and social positions. Their diversity and the differences of performed masculinities in my illustrations point not to a mere variety of styles or forms of masculinity, but to their differences in material reality and within the representation system. Furthermore, they foreground the constructed nature of gender by demonstrating the interdependence of masculinity and other social identities, and shed light on "gender differences" among women and female-born genderqueers. Although many feminist scholars have written about racial, sexual, and class differences among women, they have tended to assume that women share the same gender, based on femaleness (the female body). They have rarely unpacked the ways in which class, race, and sexuality construct gender differences.<sup>183</sup> However, old white (Irish) butch Shaw, Japanese-white mixed transgender shorb, Tamil Sri Lankan gay (woman) boi D'Lo, and many other drag kings exhibit conflicting or divergent gender presentations and identities through performance and in daily life. They prove that the oppositional two-genders are, in the words of

---

<sup>183</sup> Butler's "gender performativity" contributed to the elaboration of feminist gender construction theory. Yet her main purpose was to de-essentialize the category "Woman," and she did not extend her theorization to the discussion of female-born genderqueerness and gender differences among women. Rather, Butler focused on male gays and drag queens to establish the concept of gender performativity.

Butler, a “regulatory fiction.”

Championing gender multiplicity in “The Art and Nature of Gender,” Green articulates that gender diversity is natural, and that an enforced gender binary is artificial and unnatural. He writes:

[I]f we are invested in the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as a system of socially constructed power distribution, we will never be able to value the naturalness or artfulness of an individual’s gender expression. [ . . . ] [w]e deny the incredible potential of gender variance and its natural diversity, and we categorically deny [an] individual’s agency in experiencing or freely expressing their own gender. (2001: 66, 69)

I am convinced that theatre/performance can effectively function as a vehicle to reveal the performative nature of gender and to facilitate “the artfulness of gender expression.” Despite their different ways of performing masculinities, all performers in my case studies explore the natural diversity of gender, and by virtue of the artificiality of theatre, they play with “the complex interplay, slippage, and parodic recontextualization of gender markers and gender categories” (Garber 134). Their clothing, packing, facial hair, and stylized gestures and the disjuncture between femaleness and masculinity highlight that masculinity does not intrinsically derive from male bodies. Making use of theatrical devices, butch and genderqueer performers “put in question identities previously conceived as stable, unchallengeable, grounded, and ‘known’” (Garber 13) and extol the incredible potential of gender variance. By staging the gender variance of female-born persons, queer performers demystify the assumed non-performativity (“realness”) of masculinity and denaturalize the association of femaleness and femininity. In doing so,

they encourage free gender expression and prove that masculinities can be embodied by female-born persons without maleness. Furthermore, the performance of queer genders generates alternative sexualities and produces a new vision of social arrangements of gender, sexuality, class, and race.

Gender variance in performances of masculinities demonstrates performers' different self-understanding of and relationships to femaleness/the female body. Shaw foregrounds the conflicts between her uncontrollable menopausal body and masculinity. Although she highlights her frustration and battles in maintaining gentlemanliness in menopause, she nevertheless centers on and spotlights her female experiences (menopause) without hiding or avoiding femaleness. Whereas shorb, D'Lo, and many other drag kings bind their chests in their performances, Shaw exposes her naked upper body in *To My Chagrin*. As she gets older, she more comfortably surrenders to and embraces her femaleness and uses it as a queer site at which she marks her butch grandmotherhood. Moreover, through the ritual of being naked in the ground, Shaw connects her exposed femaleness to self-reflection on her own whiteness. In addition to her age, it seems to me that unlike other genderqueers, Shaw's butch identity plays a crucial role in her embrace of femaleness. Since she performs as herself, her autographical performance of aging butchness offers a rich archive of how an older butch configures her femaleness and masculinity over time. Some butch lesbians are uncomfortable with their female bodies, but they still remain female and do not want to transition gender. Compared to Shaw, D'Lo is young (in her 20s), but she formulates her boi identity without any rejection of her femaleness. Although she performs male characters and her hip-hop boi self in *Ramble-Ations*, she claims, "I am, Obviously and

Gloriously, a woman” and “I want to be the best man, by being the best woman.”

Recently, in her new production of *Ramble-Ations* in NYC, D’Lo endeavors to spiritually understand her female boi-ness. She revealed her naked back, saying, “I will keep this [female] body for the theatre. I got this stage [. . .] And I revere this like I revere any woman.”<sup>184</sup> Both Shaw and D’Lo ground their butch identity and boi identity on the co-habitation of femaleness and masculinity.

In contrast, many drag kings and other queer performers, who do not identify as female, are reluctant to display their femaleness. Their performances expose the artifice and performativity of gender and seek gender fluidity; they do not draw attention to their female bodies in performance. Since many masculine drag kings usually perform male characters or male alter egos and use music sung by men, they tend to bury their femaleness underneath male/masculine costumes. Instead, they focus on embodying or commenting on the illusion of maleness. Exceptionally, in the 8<sup>th</sup> IDKE showcase, Chicago’s Most Unwanted’s (CMU) Xavier Onasis and Houston Gendermyn’s (HG) Kit Kat spoke in their own (female) voices to frame their performances or to clarify their political messages. In shorb’s case, s/he identifies as transgender and does not see himself as female. However, on stage, hir female body and voice are obviously conspicuous and present, which allows her to play with the disjuncture between hir femaleness and multiple masculinities throughout hir different male characters. By

---

<sup>184</sup> D’Lo performed a new version of *Ramble-Ations* in the first National Asian American Theatre Festival at The Flea Theatre in NYC in June, 2007. In the monologue titled “Safety, Freedom (Beat: Ashanti),” while she removes her bra and then binds her chest, she faces a Hindu altar on stage, turning her naked back toward the audience. I quote D’Lo’s e-mail to me on Aug 31, 2007. I had an additional conversation with her on the phone on Oct 21, 2007 to hear more details about this complex scene (which I was not able to see performed).

comparing the performers' configuration of femaleness and masculinity, I do not intend to judge and evaluate which is more desirable and subversive. Rather, I want to underscore the extent that femaleness is differently conceived and embodied by female-born masculine subjects in the construction and performance of masculinities.

My case studies illustrate the multiplicity and variance of the butch as well as the redefinition of butchness. Shaw displays a chivalrous butch sexuality predicated on a traditional butch-femme dyad. She represents her (butch) self as a protector for femmes, which is linked to her longtime embodiment of the working-class butch-femme model and to the lesbian culture of a previous generation. On the contrary, some genderqueer drag kings, in the younger generation, are more inclined to express butch/butch or trans/trans or butch/trans desire. Irrespective of their individual preference, many drag kings frequently portray butch/butch or other homo-gendered erotic relationships between two masculine genderqueers. Like the gay boy-daddy relationship between a priest and an altar boy in *XY: Drag*, butch/butch desire is juxtaposed with gay sexuality, muddying the distinction between lesbian and gay sexuality and challenging the concepts of the lesbian and the gay.

Butch/butch sexuality disrupts the conventional understanding of butch identity rooted in the interdependent role-playing of butch/femme. Divorcing butch identity from the butch-femme bipolarity and expanding butchness through butch/butch desire, Inness and Lloyd suggest:

[O]ther constructs, such as butch/butch goes a step further by also destabilizing constructs of heterogendered desire and homosexuality as well. [. . .] Butch/butch desire negates the binary oppositions female/male

and self/other [. . .], and hence is tremendously threatening. [. . .]  
[b]utch/butch eroticism raises the spectre of male homosexuality, which  
might offend and confound the audience. (24, 25)

The identification and bond between gender outlaws who have masculine gender embodiment in common lead them to desire each other. The new emergence of butch/butch eroticism indicates a divergent, vast realm of butchness and different ideas about what it means to be butch. Butch/butch attraction makes it clear that being butch does not necessitate inter-dependent subjectivity with femmes.

The contrast between Shaw and young drag kings stems from a generation difference and the influence of queer politics within lesbian culture since the 1990s. Butches and femmes in the 1970s advocated lesbian desire toward gender difference within the butch/femme, against the cultural imperative of androgyny and resisted middle-class lesbian-feminists' condemnation of butch/femme role-playing. Now, butch/butch eroticism revises the established lesbian grammar of the butch/femme, multiplying the possibilities of lesbian genders and desire.

While Shaw persistently relies on the traditional butch-femme dyad, she reconfigures butchness by disclosing her emotional vulnerability. In performing her aging butch masculinity, Shaw does not restrain or suppress her emotional effervescence. By describing herself as having a vulnerable heart full of longing, sorrow, feelings of loss, and loneliness, she overlaps her soft and fragile inside with her exterior toughness. In doing so, Shaw articulates that masculinity does not have to exclude emotionality, and that butchness should not be equated with emotional impenetrability.

In opposition to some feminists' vilification of excessive masculinity and male-identification, performers in my case studies confirm and radicalize feminism through their genderqueerness and performances of masculinities. D'Lo criticizes men's arrogance, privilege, and violence by performing a self-reflective feminist masculinity in her male impersonation. Shaw offers a gender-bending reinterpretation of menopause and deconstructs the prevailing notions that menopausal women are asexual and frustrated by their loss of fertility and womanhood. Drag king troupe Cuntry Kings stands up for women's struggles and rights, and The Dangers & Noah Boyz encourages solidarity and coalition building between feminism and queer politics. As Rubin indicates, feminist subjectivity is forged by political commitment, and not by female-identification. She writes:

There are many problems with the notion of male identified, not the least of which are questions of who defines what "women's interests" are in a given situation and the assumption of a unitary category of "women" whose interests are always the same. But the point here is not a political critique of the concept of male identification. It is simply to register that a similarity in terminology has often led to a conflation of political positions with gender identities. A strongly masculine butch will not necessarily identify politically with men. (468)

Female-born genderqueers deconstruct the unitary category of "Woman" and explore and evolve queer feminism through their performances of masculinities. Boi feminists, butch feminists, and transgender feminists bring to light gender diversity among all female-born subjects and validate feminism's applicability to a multitude of genders.

As I stressed in the introduction of my dissertation, part of my project has been to make internal differences within Asianness/Asian-Americanness visible and to de-center the assumed homogeneity of Asianness. Three Asian-descent performers – shorb, D’Lo, and Chang (Charleston Chu) – present different strategies to combat racist stereotypes of Asian men as effeminate, and perform diverse styles of Asian masculinities according to their ethnicity, politics, cultural identity, and venue/performance form. shorb counters the racial stereotypes of Asians and Asian masculinity by creating assertive, confrontational, and aggressive Asian male characters. D’Lo bolsters her masculinity by embodying black hip-hop masculinity and compensates for emasculated Asian masculinity that is considered inferior and weak in opposition to potent Western masculinity by emphasizing the spiritual strength and wisdom of Gandhi G. Chang exaggerates stereotypes of effeminate Asian gay men as a method of resistance and enjoys free gender expression, far from being constrained by racial stereotypes and other burdens of representation. It is worth noting that East Asians are more visible in dominant representations of Asians in America, and they fit into the given racial scheme: Asians have “yellow” skin. Accordingly, the feminization of Asian men more directly targets East Asians (Japanese shorb and Chinese Chang) rather than South Asian D’Lo. However, since shorb and D’Lo perform different characters in lengthy theatre/performance art pieces for critical audiences and audiences of color at ALLGO,<sup>185</sup> they can delve into the intricate relations of masculinity and race in depth and adequately deliver their messages with speech and other theatrical devices. In

---

<sup>185</sup> The small audiences at ALLGO consisted of shorb’s and D’Lo’s friends and acquaintances, political artists/activists/community workers/writers of color, and progressive scholars and intellectuals.

contrast, Chang dances in the short act of Charleston Chu, lip-syncing one song for the huge audience (mostly white lesbians and queers) in the predominantly entertainment-driven atmosphere of drag king shows. Therefore, compared to those of shorb and D'Lo, the legibility of Chang's performance is inherently limited, and the danger of misreading increases.

As I brought up in the drag king chapter, despite increasing numbers of transgenders in lesbian/queer cultures, transgender subjectivity and experiences have been still underrepresented in genderqueer performances. shorb also identifies as transgender, but in Dean's monologue (hir autobiographical character), the bathroom problem and gender policing do not only affect transgenders. Butch lesbians also experience gender dysphoria, gender bashing, and bathroom problems. Unless a performer directly addresses trans issues and proffers their trans identity, trans masculinity is rarely differentiated from lesbian butchness on stage. In drag king shows, since each one skit or act is very short and because drag kings almost always lip-sync and pantomime, it is hard for drag kings to examine and stage transgender politics and issues in depth. Although shorb's *of chicks, dicks, and chinks* has enough running time in a performance art form, shorb chose to focus on Asian male characters rather than on specifying hir transgender identity.

In this context, I introduce three solo performances of female-bodied trans (gender) masculinities that deserve further academic scrutiny: Lynn Breedlove's *One Freak Show: Less Rock, More Hilarity* (2005), Sile P. Singleton's *Paint* (2006), and Scott

Turner Schofield's *Becoming a Man in 127 EASY Steps* (2007).<sup>186</sup> Breedlove is a white transgender dyke punk/homo hop (queer hip-hop) musician/writer/performer. In *One Freak Show*, as a "man-hating man,"<sup>187</sup> he portrays his own feminist transgender politics and identity. Breedlove's performance revolves around playing with cross-dressing stuffed animals, chest binding, the ability to pee while standing up, bathroom problems, stories about his mom and his queer family, and his commentary on community conflicts between feminism and transgenderism. Since Breedlove identifies as transgender without gender reassignment surgery and hormone injections and mainly discusses the tension between feminism and transgenderism, *One Freak Show* will be a useful text to interrogate what (fe)maleness and transgender masculinity mean, and how maleness and masculinity have been conceptualized in feminist and queer history.

Singleton's *Paint* depicts "the character (The Painter)'s navigations with gender as it intersects with race and class while also sorting out self identity."<sup>188</sup> Singleton is a black drag king/emcee/lecturer/activist/playwright and is also the owner and producer of Fast Friday Productions (Columbus, OH), which produces queer events and performances.<sup>189</sup> With respect to his gender and sexual identity, Singleton says, "I am neither ftm [female to male] or mtf [male to female]. [. . .] I truly believe I am neither

---

<sup>186</sup> I saw Breedlove's *One Freak Show* on Feb 15, 2007 at The Off Center in Austin, but I did not see either Singleton's *Paint* or Schofield's *Becoming a Man in EASY 127 Steps*.

<sup>187</sup> The man-hating man implies that he identifies as male, but she also criticizes male dominance and privilege. It also resonates with social accusation of lesbians and feminists as man-haters. Through his proclamation of man-hating, Breedlove clarifies that he does not want to compromise his feminism to gain social acceptance. He says, "I like 'he' but I don't want give up my 'I'm taking a stand for the feminist dykes and I'm going to stand up for women forever'" (Gordon). Following his preference, I use male pronouns for Breedlove.

<sup>188</sup> Singleton's e-mail response to me on Oct 15, 2007.

<sup>189</sup> As I noted in my drag king chapter, Singleton is one of the co-founders of IDKE.

[man nor woman] AND I am both [man and woman]. [. . .] I am Trans. Period. [. . .] Politically, I still identify as a lesbian but spiritually I think my most prevalent feeling/spirit is male.”<sup>190</sup> By eschewing labels such as FTM, Singleton attempts to destabilize the term trans.<sup>191</sup> In his 105 minute one-person show, *Paint*, Singleton “uses a unique blend of personal narrative, social commentary, and street savvy readiness to explore and expose the murky complicated margins that inform his ever-changing understanding of trans-self.”<sup>192</sup> The performance questions what trans is as it chronicles The Painter’s (a blue-collar worker) continuous transformation throughout the play: “Is it a he? Is it a she? What is it?”<sup>193</sup> Considering that Singleton identifies as black, Midwestern, a bi-cultural wife and mother, and trans,<sup>194</sup> *Paint* is an invaluable text with which to investigate multiple identities that constitute a trans-self, to observe constant negotiations between blackness and masculinity, and to generate new meanings of trans.

Schofield’s *Becoming a Man in 127 EASY Steps (Becoming)* is about a story of his personal and social transition from female to male, which includes memoir, sitcom, and aerial acrobatics.<sup>195</sup> Schofield is a white playwright/performance artist (full-time) and self-identifies as “a female-to-male transsexual with a transgender identity.”<sup>196</sup> He

---

<sup>190</sup> I quote Singleton’s words from his e-mail to me on Oct 15, 2007. In the same e-mail, he also writes, “He or she is OK for me, but I have to admit that I like he better.” Following his preference, I use male pronouns to indicate Singleton.

<sup>191</sup> In the same e-mail, he adds, “As a boi I wear eyeliner. [. . .] As a Transman I use my voice that is not made bold by T [Testosterone]. As a woman I love to pack [stuffing with penile prosthetics] whether I have a skirt or not.”

<sup>192</sup> <<http://www.fastfridayproductions.com/paint.htm>>.

<sup>193</sup> His e-mail to me on Oct 15, 2007.

<sup>194</sup> <<http://www.myspace.com/fastfridayproductions>>.

<sup>195</sup> <<http://unergroundtransit.com/5years.html>>.

<sup>196</sup> He began his performance art career working as a research assistant to Holly Hughes and Carmelita Tropicana at the WOW café in NYC in 2000.

<<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=61445290>>.

used to be a radical lesbian feminist, and he has not undergone gender transition surgery, but has begun testosterone injections. Introducing his show in a video clip on The 7 Stages (a non-profit theatre company in Atlanta, GA) web site, Schofield says that he looks like (or passes for) a straight guy or a gay man or a butch lesbian, depending on his clothing, attitude, and who is looking at him.<sup>197</sup> In *Becoming*, Schofield deals with the complexities and contradictions of gender dysphoria and being a female-bodied transman. Yet being aware of “the true diversity of the trans community,” he remarks, “I make it clear that the experience I’m telling then is solely my own, and . . . I break down the whole race-class-sexuality-gender-access privileging thing as best I can” (Anderson-Minshall). A comparative analysis of these three solo performances will provide a significant juxtaposition of how “trans” is differently signified for female-born genderqueers and performed across race, class, and geographical locations/local identities: San Francisco and Bay Area (Breedlove), Columbus (Midwestern Singleton), and Atlanta (Southern Schofield).

Through my research and writing, I have been inspired by and attracted to the performers and learned much from them. I have taken great critical pleasure from writing about these performances, and through my writing, I found that I both identify with and admire the performers. I was captivated by Shaw’s vulnerability and touched by her self-reflection on racism and whiteness. I was struck by Shorb’s courage and critical brilliance to confront racism toward Asians and racial castration of Asian men. I was moved and healed by D’Lo’s humor, generosity, compassion, warmth, and spiritual

---

<sup>197</sup> <<http://www.7stages.org/cgi-bin/MySQLdb?VIEW=/plays/video/view.txt&myplay=258>>.

depth that guide her political art. Through my interviews with drag kings via e-mail, I have been stimulated by their insightful comments and our productive conversations, which helped me enrich and parse out my arguments in this dissertation. I was electrified by CMU's "What/Who Makes America" and HG's "San Quentin," and laughed long and hard seeing Butchballet's smart genderfucking dance.

One of the biggest lessons I have come away with is the realization that any categories and labels of gender cannot capture the myriad individual experiences that encompass class, race, ethnicity, age, personality, and political beliefs. As Halberstam argues, "the end of identity" in the era of gender fiction "does not mean a limitless and boundless shifting of positions and forms, rather it indicates the futility of stretching terms like *lesbian* or *gay* or *straight* or *male* or *female* across vast fields of experience, behavior, and self-understanding" (1994: 210). All identities are elastic and subjective, and there is no general rule to define an each category/identity, which illuminates gender diversity and multiplicity. Under any category, internal variations and anomalies exist, and the category is constantly reconfigured and transformed through butch and genderqueer performances. As Rubin maintains, categories of gender and sexuality are always under construction by different workers.

No system of classification can successfully catalogue or explain the infinite vagaries of human diversity. [. . .] Thus, no category can ever contain completely all the gender variants, and categories like 'woman,' 'butch,' 'lesbian,' or 'transsexual' are all imperfect, historical, temporary, and arbitrary. (473, 477)

Many performers in my case studies strive to destabilize customary categories of gender

and to push the limits of the established concepts of gender. In doing so, they complicate gender performativity and elaborate social constructionist theory through their performances of queer masculinities.

In his interview, “Combat Boots and Helium Heels,” Breedlove epitomizes genderqueers’ constant reconstruction of their genders: “I’ve always been this paradoxical amalgam. I’m a combination of opposites, and I need to be able to accept all of them. I’ve totally evolved – influenced by my environment, genetics, and social constructs, and I wonder who I’m going to become next” (Burana 218). Like Breedlove’s statement, butch and genderqueer performers take the stage to actualize ceaseless gender evolution and to imagine what is coming next.

Gender, “the old battleground,” has emerged as “the new battleground and the new playground” (Wilchins 53) since the 1990s. After the Second Wave of feminism problematized gender inequity between men and women and theorized gender as a social construct in the 1970s, gender has been located at the heart of a new battleground between feminism, racial politics, queer politics, and transgenderism. Yet the battleground has also been a playground where queer performers revel in the pleasure of experimenting with alternative genders. In “Erotic Arguments and Persuasive Acts,” Tara Pauliny succinctly recapitulates the implications of gender subversion by female-born genderqueers:

[W]hen women pair their culturally proscribed gender with gender performances deemed acceptable only for men, they awaken an awareness of a multiplicity of possible truths, rearrange and revalue the performance

of sexuality, race, and gender, and engage in an activity that exploits the fissures inherent in such constructions. (244)

Shaw, Shorb, D'Lo, and other drag king performers resist the invisibility and demonization of female masculinity, propose the artfulness of multiple genders, and ultimately, reclaim female masculinity as a critical lens to excavate gender, class, racial/ethnic, and sexual contradictions. This playground/battleground is where social challenge begins.

Simultaneously, as Halberstam cautions, it is essential to remember that reinventing the meanings of gender is always affected by “socially constructed scripts” and situated within given cultural and political contexts (qtd. in Braziel 183-184). Female-born genderqueers perform masculinities and queer genders, coming to terms with limitations and possibilities of gender subversion. Recognizing that gender transgression occurs in the confines of social scripts, Halberstam pronounces: “[G]ender variance [. . .] cannot be relied on to produce a radical and oppositional politics simply by virtue of representing difference. Radical interventions come from careful consideration of racial and class constructions of [. . .] gender identities (1998: 173).” I argue that in addition to staging the diversity and multiplicity of gender, to become astute gender art, the performance of female masculinities must entail an extensive examination of class, racial, and sexual politics as well as an introspective look into the internal contradictions in lesbian/queer cultures and communities. Consequently, cutting-edge performances of queer masculinities will challenge, invite, and allow us to reconstruct our perceptions of gender.

## Bibliography

- Adler, Lisa and L.H.M. Ling. "From Practice to Theory: Towards a Dissident-Feminist Reconstruction of Nonviolence." Gandhi Marg 16.4 (1995): 462-480.
- Allison, Dorothy. Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature. Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1994.
- Bergman, S. Bear. Butch Is a Noun. San Francisco: Suspect Thoughts Press, 2006.
- Bhumika, K. Interview with D'Lo. The Hindu 16 Dec 2004. 9 Jan 2006  
<<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp2004/12/16/stories/20041216011440100.htm>>.
- Blair, Rhonda. "Not . . . but/Not-Not-Me: Musings on Cross-gender Performance." Upstaging Big Daddy. Eds. Ellen Donkin & Susan Clement. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993. 291-305.
- Boucher, Sandy. "Half of a Map." Off the Rag: Lesbian Writings on Menopause. Eds. Lee Lynch and Akia Woods. Norwich: New Victoria, 1996. 165-172.
- Braziel, Jana Evans. "Dréd's Drag Kinging of Race, Sex, and the Queering of the American Racial *Machine-Désirante*." Women & Performance 15:2 (2005): 161-187.
- Browne, Kath. "Genderism and the Bathroom Problem: (re)materializing sexed sites, (re)creating sexed bodies." Gender, Place and Culture 11.3 (2004): 331-346.
- Burana, Lily. "Combat Boots and Helium Heels: An Interview with Tribe 8's Lynn Breedlove." Dagger: On Butch Women. Eds. Lily Burana, Roxxie and Linnea Due. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1994. 211-219.
- . "Conversation with a Gentleman Butch." Dagger: On Butch Women. Eds. Lily Burana, Roxxie and Linnea Due. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1994. 114-119.
- Butler, Judith. Bodies That Matter. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . Gender Trouble. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." Inside/Out. Ed. Diana Fuss. New

- York and London: Routledge, 1991. 13-31.
- . "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." Performing Feminisms. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. 270-282.
- Butler, Sandra. "Circles and Rings: A Woman's Ritual." Dyke Life. Ed. Karla Jay. New York: Basic Books, 1995. 73.
- Califia, Patrick. "Manliness." The Transgender Studies Reader. Eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge, 2006. 434-438.
- Case, Sue-Ellen. "Making Butch: An Historical Memoir of the 1970s." Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender. Ed. Sally R. Munt. London and Washington: Cassell, 1998. 37-46.
- . "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic." The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. Ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin. New York: Routledge, 1993. 294-306.
- Chang, Sand. "Re: Charleston Chu here." E-mail to the author. 25 Oct. 2006.
- . "Charleston Chu responses." E-mail to the author. 31 Jan. 2007.
- Chatterjee, Sandra. "Impossible Hosting: D'Lo's Sets an Undomesticated Stage for South Asian Youth Artists." Women & Performance 16.3 (2006): 443-462.
- Copper, Baba. Ageism in the Lesbian Community. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1987.
- Cowan, D. Brookes, Cheryl Haller, Beth Mintz, and Esther D. Rothblum. "Lesbian Baby Boomers at Midlife." Dyke Life. Ed. Karla Jay. New York: Basic Books, 1995. 61-76.
- Cragin, Sally. "Peggy Shaw Explains Her Chagrin." Rev. of To My Chagrin, perf. Peggy Shaw. The Boston Phoenix 25 June-1 July 2004. <<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/theater/documents/03929633.asp>>.
- Crawley, Sara L. "Are Butch and Fem Working-Class and Antifeminist?" Gender & Society 15.2 (2001): 175-196.
- Crowder, Diane Griffin. "Lesbians and the (Re/De)Construction of the Female Body." Looking Queer. Ed. Dawn Atkins. New York: Haworth Press, 1998. 47-68.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. An Archive of Feelings. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

- Danger, Jake. "Re: Melanie Corn's contact info." E-mail to the author. 8 Nov. 2006.
- . "Re: the butch ballet piece." E-mail to the author. 21 Aug. 2007.
- Daly, Jeanne, Paul A. Komesaroff, and Philipa Rothfield. "Mapping Menopause: Objectivity or Multiplicity?" Reinterpreting Menopause. Eds. Daly, Komesaroff, and Rothfield. New York: Routledge, 1997. 3-16.
- Daly, Jeanne. "Facing Change: Women Speaking about Midlife." Reinterpreting Menopause. Eds. Jeanne Daly, Paul A. Komesaroff, and Philipa Rothfield. New York: Routledge, 1997. 159-175.
- Dasgupta, Sayantani and Shamita Das Dasgupta. "Women in Exile: Gender Relations in the Asian Indian Community in the United States." Asian American Studies. Eds. Jean Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 324-337.
- Davy, Kate. "Outing Whiteness: A feminist/Lesbian Project." Theatre Journal 47 (1995): 189-205.
- DeLombard, Jeannine. Interview with Peggy Shaw. Philadelphia Citypaper. 10-17 Apr 1997. 25 Mar 2004 <<http://citypaper.net/articles/041097/article001.shtml>>.
- Dhairyam, Sagri. "Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics." The Lesbian Postmodern. Ed. Laura Doan. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 25-46.
- Diamond, Elin. "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism." A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance. Ed. Martin Carol. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. 120-135.
- . Unmaking Mimesis: essays on feminism and theatre. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Dolan, Jill. "attached . . ." E-mail to the author. 24 May. 2007.
- . "Breaking the Code: Musings on Lesbian Sexuality and the Performer." Modern Drama 32.1 (1989): 146-158.
- . "chapter, finally." E-mail to the author. 8 Oct. 2007.
- . "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" Gender in Performance. Ed. Laurence Senelick. Hanover: UP of New England, 1992. 3-13.
- . "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative.'" Theatre Journal 53

- (2001): 455-479.
- . "Shaw chapter." E-mail to the author. 29 Aug. 2007.
- D'Lo. "Ballin' with My Bois." Unpublished script, 2004.
- . No Shame ... Part 1 and Part 2. Self-Published Xerox binding, 2004.
- . No Shame ... Part 3. Self-Published Xerox binding, 2006.
- . "Ramble-Ations." Unpublished script, 2006.
- . Ramble-Ations: A One D'Lo's Show. Dir. D'Lo. Perf. D'Lo. Tillery Theatre, Austin. 28 Jan 2006.
- . "Ramble-Ations Program Note." 2006.
- . "Re: question from Ji Hye." E-mail to the author. 20 Aug. 2007.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. Reflecting Black/African-American Cultural Criticism. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Echols, Alice. Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989.
- Eng, David L. Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001.
- Eng, David L. and Alice Y. Hom. "Q& A: Notes on a Queer Asian America." Q& A: queer in Asian America. Eds. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. 1-21.
- Epstein, Emma. "'Debutante Balls' Lecture Challenges Gender Stereotypes." Rev. of Debutante Balls, per. Scott Turner Schofield. 8 Apr 2005. 19 Sep 2007 <<http://www.undergroundtransit.com/VassarRev2005.html>>.
- Epstein, Rachel. "Butches with Babies: Reconfiguring Gender and Motherhood." Femme/Butch: New Considerations of the Way We Want to Go. Eds. Michelle Gibson and Deborah T. Meem. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002. 41-57.
- Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Ferguson, Marcia L. "Menopausal Gentleman." Rev. of Menopausal Gentleman, per. Peggy Shaw. Theatre Journal 50 (1998): 374-375.

- Frankenberg, Ruth. White Women, Race Matters. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Fredrickson, George. "White Images of Black Slaves." Critical White Studies: looking behind the mirror. Eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997. 38-45.
- Freistasdt, Berta and Marg Yeo. "A Cruel Trick: Menopause/Aging." Out the Other Side: contemporary lesbian writing. London: Virago Press, 1988. 30-39.
- Frye, Marilyn. Willful Virgin: essays in feminism. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1992.
- Fung, Richard. "Looking for My Penis." Asian American Studies. Eds. Jean Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 338-353.
- Gabriel, Karen. "The Importance of Being Gandhi: gendering the national subject in Bombay cinema." South Asian Masculinities. Eds. Radhika Choppa, Caroline Osella and Flippo Osella. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004. 264-304.
- Garber, Marjorie. Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gerestant, Mildred Diyaa. "Exposure of a Multispirited, Haitian-American, Gender-Harmonizing WoMan." Cast Out: queer lives in theatre. Ed. Robin Bernstein. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2006. 44-50.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. Impossible Desires: Queer Diaspora and South Asian Public Cultures. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005.
- Gordon, Miryam. "One Freak Show review and interview." Rev. of One Freak Show: Less Rock, More Hilarity, per. Lynn Breedlove. Seattle Gay News 7 Sep 2007. 7 Oct 2007 <[http://www.sgn.org/sgnnews35\\_36/page25.cfm](http://www.sgn.org/sgnnews35_36/page25.cfm)>.
- Green, Jamison. "The Art and Nature of Gender." Unseen Genders: Beyond the Binaries. Eds. Felicity Haynes and Tarquam McKenna. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001. 59-70.
- . "Part of the Package: Ideas of Masculinity among Male-Identified Transpeople." Men and Masculinities 7.3 (2005): 291-299.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. Volatile Bodies. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994.

- Halberstam, Judith. "Between Butches." Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender. Ed. Sally R. Munt. London and Washington: Cassell, 1998. 57-66.
- . "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity." The Lesbian Postmodern. Ed. Laura Doan. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 210-228.
- . Female Masculinity. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.
- . "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: men, women, and masculinity." Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory. Ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. 344-367.
- . In a Queer Time & Place. New York and London: New York UP, 2005.
- . "Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene." Social Text 52/53, 15.3/4 (1997): 104-131.
- Halberstam, Judith "Jack" and Del LaGrace Volcano. The Drag King Book. London: Serpent's Tail, 1999.
- Hale, C. Jacob. "Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies." Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader. Eds. Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 61-70.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Theorizing diaspora. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. 233-246.
- . "What Is This Black in Black Popular Culture?" Representing Blackness. Ed. Valerie Smith. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997. 123-133.
- Hernandez, Michael M. "Boundaries: Gender and Transgenderism." The Second Coming: a Leatherdyke Reader. Eds. Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney. Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1996. 63-70.
- Hollibaugh, Amber and Cherríe Moraga. "What We're Rollin' around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism: A Conversation toward Ending Them." The Persistent Desire. Ed. Joan Nestle. Boston: Alyson, 1992. 243-253.
- Inness, Sherrie A. "Flunking Basic Gender Training: Butches and Butch Style Today." Looking Queer. Ed. Dawn Atkins. New York: Haworth Press, 1998. 233-237.
- . The Lesbian Menace. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1997.
- Inness, Sherrie A. and Lloyd, Michele E. "G.I Joes in Barbie Land." Queer Studies.

- Eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason. New York: New York UP, 1996. 9-34.
- Jackson, Shannon. Professing Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Jagose, Annamarie. "Masculinity Without Men." Interview with Judith Halberstam. Genders 29 (1999) 6 Mar 2006 <[http://genders.org/g29/g29\\_halberstam.html](http://genders.org/g29/g29_halberstam.html)>.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. Appropriating Blackness. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003.
- Johnson, Richard L. "Gandhi's Soul Politics: The Liberation of Women and Men in India." Gandhi Marg 21.1 (1999): 5-20.
- Juang, Richard M. "Transgendering the Politics of Recognition." Transgender Rights. Eds. Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Kadi, Joanna. Thinking Class. Boston: South End Press, 1996.
- Katz, Jonathan. Gay American History. New York: Crowell, 1976. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1985.
- Keating, AnnLouise. "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' (De)Constructing 'Race'." College English 57.8 (1995): 901-918.
- Kelly, Jennifer. Zest for Life: Lesbian's Experiences of Menopause. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2005.
- Kibria, Nazil. "Not Asian, Black, or White? Reflections on South Asian American Racial Identity." Asian American Studies. Eds. Jean Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 247-254.
- Kit Kat. "Re: question about Austin IDKE showcase performance." E-mail to the author. 31 Oct. 2006.
- . "Re: question about Austin IDKE showcase performance." E-mail to the author. 1 Nov. 2006.
- . "Re: race and San Quentin piece." E-mail to the author. 22 Sep. 2007.
- Kulbokas, Maggie. "Butch Grandmas & American Cars." Rev. of To My Chagrin, perf. Peggy Shaw. <<http://www.what.org/cctpegrev.htm>>.
- Kumashiro, Kevin. ed. Restoried Selves: autobiographies of queer Asian/Pacific American activists. Binghamton: Harrington Park Press, 2004.

- Lamos, Colleen. "Taking on the Phallus." Lesbian Erotics. Ed. Karla Jay. New York and London: New York UP, 1995. 101-124.
- Lee, JeeYeun. "Why Suzie Wong Is Not a Lesbian: Asian and Asian American Lesbian and Bisexual Women and Femme/Butch/Gender Identities." Queer Studies. Eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason. New York and London: New York UP, 1996. 115-132.
- Lindorff, Dave. "Sacrificial Murder by Texas: Frances Newton Died for Bush's Sins." 15 Sep 2005. 12 Sep 2007 <<http://www.counterpunch.org/lindorff9152005.html>>.
- Lo, Malinda. "Review of Drag Kings on Tour." dir. Sonia Slutsky. 20 June 2004. 18 Sep 2007. <<http://www.afterellen.com/Movies/62024/dragkingsontour.html>>.
- Lott, Eric. "All the King's Men: Elvis Impersonators and White Working-Class Masculinity." Race and the Subject of Masculinities. Eds. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1997. 192-227.
- Loulan, Joann. "Butch Mothers, Femme Bull Dykes: Dismantling Our Own Stereotypes." Dyke Life. Ed. Karla Jay. New York: Basic Books, 1995. 247-256.
- . "Now When I Was Your Age: One Perspective on How Lesbian Culture Has Influenced Our Sexuality." Lesbians at Midlife: The Creative Transition. Eds. Barbara Sang, Joyce Warshaw and Adrienne J. Smith. San Francisco: spinster book company, 1991. 10-18.
- Lowe, Lisa. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity and Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." Asian American Studies. Eds. Jean Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 423-442.
- . "On Edward Said." Amerasia Journal 31.1 (2005): 48-51.
- Lucas, Craig. Interview with Peggy Shaw. BOMB. # 69 Fall 1999. <<http://www.bombsite.com/archive/shaw1.html>>.
- Mahoney, Martha R. "The Social Construction of Whiteness." Critical White Studies: looking behind the mirror. Eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997. 330-333.
- Maltz, Robin. "Real Butch." Journal of Gender Studies 7.3 (1998): 273-286.

- Melo, Frederick. "Of Hot Rods and Cold Truths." Rev. of To My Chagrin, perf. Peggy Shaw. Cape Cod Times Online 5 July 2004. 25 Sep 2004  
<<http://www.capecodonline.com/cctimes/edits/cctblogs/reviews/archives/0...>>.
- Anderson-Minshall, Jacob. "Taking His Clothes Off Gains Trans Artist Prestigious Award." San Francisco Bay Times. 23 Aug 2007. 11 Oct 2007  
<[http://www.sfbaytimes.com/index.php?sec=article&article\\_id=6758](http://www.sfbaytimes.com/index.php?sec=article&article_id=6758)>.
- Moriel, Liora. "Passing and the Performance of Gender, Race, and Class Acts." Women & Performance 15.1 (2005): 167-210.
- Moraga, Cherríe. Loving in the War Years. Cambridge: South End Press, 2000.
- Moutaingrove, Jean. "Hot Flash to Warm Glow." Off the Rag: Lesbians Writing on Menopause. Eds. Lee Lynch and Akia Woods. Norwich: New Victoria Publishers, 1996. 59-63.
- Munt, Sally R. Heroic Desire: lesbian identity and cultural space. London and Washington: Cassell, 1998.
- . "Orifices in Space: Making the Real Possible." Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender. Eds. Munt, Sally R. London and Washington: Cassell, 1998. 200-209.
- Muñoz, Jose Esteban. Disidentification. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999.
- Nakayama, Thomas. "Show/Down Time: 'Race,' Gender, Sexuality, and Popular Culture." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 11 (1994): 162-179.
- Namaste, Ki. "'Tragic Misreadings': Queer Theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity." Queer Studies: a lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender anthology. Eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason. New York and London: New York UP, 1996. 183-203.
- Nataf, Zachary I. Lesbians Talk Transgender. London: Scarlet Press, 1996.
- Neeve. "hot like coals." Unpublished spoken word text, 2006.
- Nestle, Joan. "Genders on My Mind." Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary. Eds. Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins. Los Angeles and New York: alyson books, 2002. 3-10.
- . A Restricted Country. Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1987.
- Newton, Esther. "My Butch Career: A Memoir." Queer Ideas. Ed. Center for Lesbian

- and Gay Studies. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY New York, 2003. 83-97.
- Olson, Alix. "Gender Game." <[http://www.alixolson.com/lyrics/BLT\\_gendergame.html](http://www.alixolson.com/lyrics/BLT_gendergame.html)>.
- O'Sullivan, Sue. Used to Be Nice: Sexual Affairs. London and New York: Cassell, 1996.
- Palmer, Caroline. "Gentlemen Prefer Menopause." Rev. of Menopausal Gentleman, per. Peggy Shaw. Culturata 23 June 1999. 22 Mar 2004. <<http://www.citipages.com/databank/20/968/article7699.asp>>.
- Pauliny, Tara. "Erotic Arguments and Persuasive Acts: Discourses of Desire and the Rhetoric of Female-to-Male Drag." The Drag King Anthology. Eds. Donna Troka, Kathleen Lebesco, and Jean Bobby Noble. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002. 221-248.
- Paur, Jasbir K. "Transnational Sexualities: South Asian (Trans)nation(alism) and Queer Diasporas." Q& A: queer in Asian America. Eds. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. 405-422.
- Penelope, Julia. "Learning to Live with My Body." Off the Rag: Lesbian Writings on Menopause. Eds. Lee Lynch and Akia Woods. Norwich: New Victoria, 1996. 126-132.
- Perille, Gina. "Butch's Eye View." Rev. of To My Chagrin, perf. Peggy Shaw. Bay Windows 14 July 2004. 25 Sep 2004 <<http://www.baywindows.com/news/2004/07/14/Fun/Butchs.Eye.View-693435.shtml>>.
- Piontek, Thomas. "Kinging in the Heartland; or, The Power of Marginality." The Drag King Anthology. Eds. Donna Troka, Kathleen Lebesco, and Jean Bobby Noble. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002. 125-143.
- Reich, June L. "Genderfuck: The Law of the Dildo." Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: a Reader. Ed. Fabio Cleto. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999. 254-265.
- Roediger, David R. Towards the Abolition of Whiteness. London and New York: Verso, 1994.
- Rose, Tricia. "A Style Nobody Can Deal With: Politics, Style and the Postindustrial City in Hip Hop." Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture. Eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose. New York: Routledge, 1994. 71-88.

- Rubin, Gayle. "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries." The Persistent Desire. Ed. Joan Nestle. Boston: Alyson, 1992. 466-482.
- Rubin, Henry S. "Reading Like a (Transsexual) Man." Men Doing Feminism. Ed. Tom Digby. New York and London: Routledge, 1998. 305-324.
- Sandell, Jillian. "Telling Stories of 'Queer White Trash.'" White Trash: race and class in America. Eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 211-230.
- Schlossberg, Linda. "Rites of Passing." Passing: identity and interpretation in sexuality, race, and religion. Eds. María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg. New York and London: New York UP, 2001. 1-8.
- Senelick, Laurence. "Boys and Girls Together." Crossing the Stage. Ed. Lesley Ferris. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Shaw, Peggy. "Gosh Dirt." Telling Moments: autobiographical lesbian short stories. Ed. Lynda Hall. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003. 235-242.
- . "How I Learned Theatre." Cast Out: queer lives in theatre. Ed. Robin Bernstein. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006. 25-29.
- . "Menopausal Gentleman." Unpublished script, 1997.
- . Menopausal Gentleman. Perf. Peggy Shaw. Videocassette. n.p. n.d.
- . "To My Chagrin." Unpublished script, 2003.
- . To My Chagrin. Dir. Steve Bailey. Perf. Peggy Shaw. Videocassette. Jump-Start Performance Co., 2001.
- . "You Are Just Like My Father." O Solo Homo. Eds. Holly Hughes and David Román. New York: Grove Press, 1998. 175-198.
- shorb, kt. "of chicks, dicks, and chinks." Unpublished script, 2005.
- . "of chicks, dicks, and chinks." Dir. Madge Darlington. Perf. kt shorb. Tillery Theatre, Austin. 17 Apr, 2005.
- . "prelude and fugue in yellow and grey." Restoried Selves: autobiographies of queer Asian/Pacific American activists. Ed. Kevin Kumashiro. Binghamton: Harrington Park Press, 2004. 101-109.

- . "of chicks, chinks, and dicks: Queer Asian American Masculinity, Representation, Spectatorship, and Performance." *Masters Report*. UT Austin, 2005.
- . "Re: red necktie in your performance." E-mail to the author. 31 Oct. 2007.
- Singleton, Sile. "Re: About your show, PAINT." E-mail to the author. 15 Oct. 2007.
- Solomon, Alisa. Re-Dressing the Canon. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Stephens, Gregory. "Interracial Dialogue in Rap Music." New Formations 16 (1992): 62-79.
- Takagi, Dana Y. "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America." Amerasia Journal 20:1 (1994): 1-17.
- The National Museum & Archive of Lesbian and Gay History, comp. The Gay Almanac. New York: Berkley Books, 1996.
- Thomas, John W. "Passing on Her Butchness." Rev. of To My Chagrin, perf. Peggy Shaw. LIP 1 July 2004. 25 Sep 2004 <<http://www.what.org/peggylip.htm>>.
- Troka, Donna Jean. "The History of the First International Drag King Extravaganza." Oct 2003. 17 Sep 2007 <[http://www.idke.info/about\\_us.html#history](http://www.idke.info/about_us.html#history)>.
- Tsui, Kitty. "Give Joan Chen My Phone Number Anytime." Lesbian Erotics. Ed. Karla Jay. New York and London: New York UP, 1995. 62-70.
- Turner, Susan. "Crisis of Loss." Lesbians at Midlife: The Creative Transition. Eds. Barbara Sang, Joyce Warshow and Adrienne J. Smith. San Francisco: spinster book company, 1991. 60-64.
- Vegas, Cody Las. "Re: Chicago's Most Unwanted." E-mail to the author. 18 Sep. 2007.
- . "Re: Uncle Sam's Words." E-mail to the author. 26 Oct. 2006.
- Venkat, Lalitha. Interview with D'Lo. 6 Dec 2004. 15 Nov 2007 <<http://www.theotherfestival.com/2004/dlo.html>>.
- Walker, Lisa M. "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are." Signs 18.4 (1993): 866-890.
- Weiss, Matthew. "Interview with Jonny McGovern." 14 May 2007. 4 Sep 2007 <<http://afterelton.com/people/2007/5/jonnymcgovern>>.

- Weston, Kath. "Do Clothes Make the Woman?: Gender, Performance Theory, and Lesbian Eroticism." Genders 17 (1993): 1-21.
- Widner, Cindy. "All Over the Map: The Many Moods of International Drag KingCommunity Extravaganza 8." The Austin Chronicle 27 Oct 2006. 29 Oct 2006 <<http://austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/issue/story?oid=oid%3A413982>>.
- Wildman, Stephanie M. with Adrienne D. Davis. "Making Systems of Privilege Visible." Critical White Studies: looking behind the mirror. Eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997. 314-319.
- Wilchins, Riki. "Changing the Subject." Genderqueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary. Eds. Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins. Los Angeles and New York: Alyson Books, 2002. 47-54.
- Williams, Teresa Ky. "Race-ing and Being Raced: The Critical Interrogation of 'Passing.'" Amerasia Journal 23:1 (1997): 61-65.
- XY: Drag. Dir. Robin Deisher. Unreleased DVD. 2001.
- Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. "Expanding the Categories of Race and Sexuality in Lesbian and Gay Studies." Professions of Desire. Eds. George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995. 124-135.
- Zia, Helen. Asian American Dreams. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

## **Vita**

Je Hye Kim was born in Wonju, South Korea on January 10, 1972, the daughter of Myoung-Ok Jeong and Man-Bong Kim. After graduating from Bookwon Women's High School in Wonju in 1990, she enrolled at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea. She received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Political Science & Diplomacy from Ewha Womans University in February 1994. In March 1994 she entered the Graduate School of Ewha Womans University, and in February 1998 earned a Masters of Arts in Women's Studies. In August 2002 she entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent address: 220-775

Kangwondo Wonjusi Myounglyun 1 Dong

Hyundae 1 Cha APT 104 Dong 903 Ho

This dissertation was typed by the author.