THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Drag Performance, Identity, and Cultural Perception

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

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April 2009

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people without whose support this thesis would not exist. Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Keith Peacock and Professor Richard Boon from the Department of Drama and Music at the University of Hull. Their expert encouragement of my sometimes unorthodox approach enabled me to develop my ideas yet remain at all times critically minded. I would also like to thank Kathie Atkinson, Suzie Locke, and Dr Nigel Shaw at the Graduate School, who have handled my endless administrative enquiries with knowledge and patience.

In this vein, I would also like to express my gratitude to Christine Godfrey, Peter Godfrey, Anthony Oughton, other family members, Lauren Orton, Kat Garcia and Martin Firth for their willingness to proof read my documents, offer insightful criticism, technical support and moral support. My thanks go to the many more who have contributed to this project.

My arguments would not have developed as they have without the support of my primary respondents, Kerryn, Marcus R., Marcus M., Tony, Harry, Sam and Gerry. I am extremely grateful to them for welcoming me into their communities to watch their performances and to allow me to carry out such in-depth interviews. They were also fantastic hosts. I am also grateful to Kate Bornstein for her correspondence, comments, and sheer generosity of spirit.

Finally, I would like to thank Simon and Rowan Oughton for their willingness to put up with my endless nights on the computer and away from home, developing the work, and indeed reading the endless drafts. This is for you.

Abstract

This is the first holistic study of English cross-dressed performers. It will situate drag performers within their cultural context in order to establish how their concerns, motivations, employment, communities, friendships, self-perception and artistic ambitions impact on their performances. Furthermore, it utilises performance and ethnographic analysis of a number of artistes to demonstrate how modern drag politicises communities and forms an accessible critique of social roles. Furthermore, it aims to reunite Queer Theory with the realities of its effects on society.

The first chapter establishes the study's position within the overarching framework of Queer Theory. A troupe of drag performers are examined in light of Judith Butler's theories of performativity to elucidate how the social aspects of gender can be developed. Then, Kate Bornstein's work is used to illustrate how individuals can use these identities as a conscious method of self-development.

Following this, the second chapter explores the social role drag performers have, sometimes inadvertently, chosen. Developing the theories of the interrelationship between belief, LGBTQ sexuality and otherness purported by Kate Bornstein, it asserts the educational and social role that can be taken by drag performers.

The third chapter focuses on the messages that these LGTBQ shaman (a theory developed from Laurence Senelick's work) convey to their community via performance. Case studies illustrate how the performers tailor their acts to politicise their often apathetic audiences.

This work is extrapolated in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the community-wide Pride Parade performances. The Rabelaisian carnivalesque is used to argue that the carnivals encourage the audience to review their gender development, revitalising the culture.

Finally, the fifth chapter demonstrates how these differing theoretical strands enable televised drag performance to challenge censure by questioning 'otherness' itself. This is achieved with reference to horror theory, camp and the performances of Danny La Rue, amongst others, and the cultural impact of the programme *Little Britain* (2003). The thesis demonstrates that drag is, in fact, a dialogue that can engage and politicise mainstream culture.

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Introduction

The medium of drag performance has enabled a revised understanding of sexual identity and its effects on the role of the individual within society as a result of its impact on mainstream culture. This first holistic study of English cross-dressed performers will demonstrate how modern drag performance forms a progressive and accessible social critique that gleans its power from a theoretical background incorporating subjects ranging from the carnivalesque to Queer Theory. It will show how drag not only offers its performers the opportunity to develop their self-perception and social role, but also crosses the footlights to elicit this reflexivity in its audiences, both community specific and in mainstream society.

Performances that have been labelled as drag (either by the performers themselves or by theorists) are understood here in their widest definition as meaning clothing associated with one sex being worn by a member of the opposite sex. They do not have a specific body of work that can be examined. Rather, they comprise sometimes apparently disparate, yet inter-related, disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, politics, religion, gender theory and theatre, all of which contribute to their meanings and practice, but sometimes initially appear almost at odds with each other. Within these disciplines are topics, varying from the drag balls of 1980s' Harlem (as referenced in Livingston 1990), to provincial cabaret and pantomime, religious and folk magic rituals, protest movements, legal power and media studies. While each sphere aims to impact on the audience in the interests of their advancement, this thesis examines them within their cultural context in order to prevent misinterpretations of the data. This enables a holistic understanding of the drag

phenomenon by elucidating any similarities, points of interest, concurrent developmental phases or sub currents found in the spheres that underpin their effect as political theatre.

The primary theoretical framework through which drag performance can be understood is Queer Theory. This genre examines the concept of non-binary gender, sex and sexuality, and, while it is hugely varied, its key texts include works such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006, originally published in 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (1993), and Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994).[1] This thesis will argue that the concepts discussed within this field (such as biological sex, religion and social hierarchies) are integral to drag's influence on mainstream culture.

This builds upon a study concerning the allied aesthetic, camp, undertaken by John Latham Fisher (2001), whose focus is to highlight the subject as an academic discipline and demonstrate its effects on the audience. He contrasts what he calls the "old" school of camp theorisation, exemplified by Susan Sontag (whom he suggests perceived camp as an aesthetic that subsumed politics) to a modern conceptualisation of camp as a political tool enabling resignification of the human body (2001 18). He develops this perspective to suggest that camp's use of meta-narrative interplay can be used to question and, thus, force a redevelopment of socio-political institutions, therefore demonstrating the form's potential as theatre capable of causing social change rather than simply providing entertainment.

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[1] The term, 'non-binary' in this context relates to gender representation, biological sex, and sexuality that are not limited to stable absolutes, for example the concept that a male can display stereotypically female characteristics.

Whilst Latham Fisher's work offers some unique perspectives, owing to its refreshing emotional honesty and endeavour to see the metaphorical wood for the trees, it is encumbered by his personal preferences. He quickly dismisses the common assertion that the on-screen personas of actresses such as Greta Garbo exemplified camp through their incongruent and ironic qualities, simply because their medium contradicts his assertion that live performance is the sensibility's purest form. Moreover, as his large, autobiographical preface demonstrates, his love for the genre was formulated in conjunction with his personal politics, thus strengthening his perception of the efficacy of the style regardless of its content at the time, essentially believing that it is impossible for camp to be 'bad' or ineffective.[2] This thesis will, however, demonstrate how his basic theorisation of camp's political power can be expanded and refined to cover drag performance – primarily, though not exclusively, in the context of a male dressing in culturally feminine attire.

The very terms used to describe the sex and gender non-conformist community connote the society in which they were coined, and it is thus necessary to consider how they politicise this work.[3] The most obvious example of this is the term 'queer'. Originally an adjective denoting strange or 'odd' behaviour in comparison to the cultural norm, it is now primarily used as a differentiator from the heterosexual norm. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Judith Butler interprets it as a "shaming appellation" (1993 154). In contrast to Butler's definition, this thesis conceptualises shaming appellations as highlighting supposedly inappropriate activity to appeal to the individual's conscience to encourage

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[2] He states that "…the political playwrights of Britain made such a great impact on me because they provided my first understanding of the political. They did this by making politics fun and theatrical" (2001 10). It is this overt, self-referential, theatrical interaction that camp affords the audience that informs his perception of what he calls the "camp-political" (2001 14).

[3] For a discussion of identity politics, see Lance Salfa, "What's Wrong with 'Identity Politics?'", pp. 46-48 in Morton (1996).

them to discontinue the behaviour in the face of social censure.[4] When directed at a person, the appellation is converted from an adjective to a noun indicating the onlookers' perception of the 'strangeness', thus initialising both parties' social role, an extension of their moral standing, for discourse. Their selfhood reflects only this connotation, which is negative in the case of shaming. Should the 'shamed' person accept this definition by suggesting its validity though their reaction (rather than reflecting inappropriate provocation), they thus agree to accept the appellation and countenance shame. However, during the 1960s, the sexual non-conformist community reclaimed shaming appellants as overarching community identifiers to signify ownership of their 'queer' activities. They used the word's exposure to neutralise its power in disregard for what they considered an outmoded stigma. Nevertheless, the term is not used as a referent in this thesis as its social history can render it offensive to sections of a varied community by forcing all to accept the otherness it connotes.

As non-heterosexuals still face discrimination, it remains important that the community's key referent is concise and yet representative of all of its members. As a result, it should indicate their gender and sexuality as well as their perspectives and political objectives in terms of emancipation. It is important to realise this study will act as a form of political advocacy on their behalf as the evidence suggests they offer a valuable socio-cultural contribution. Some consider themselves to have a stable identity, while others do not wish to be defined by their gender or sexuality, and thus require a term that encourages dialogue as well as legal protection extending beyond the patriarchal, polarised homosexual /

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[4] Note on style: the pronouns "their", "they" and "them" are used to indicate the third-person singular of indefinite gender throughout this thesis (*Oxford English Dictionary – OED – Online*, accessed 10th July 2006). This form is also chosen in consideration of the respondent group, including individuals such as Kate Bornstein, who may not consider themselves representative of binary gender, rendering terms such as "him" and "her" inappropriate for overarching usage ("Kate Bornstein", npg., accessed 26th July 2008).

heterosexual paradigm. However, the use of referents that elucidate and, thus, promote political objectives must be evaluated alongside the objective depiction of the circumstances and personal politics of the individual, as their identity often elucidates the aims of their performances.

This is particularly the case when an individual's self-perception develops alongside their new and anticipated experiences, which can lead to issues of new definition and thought rather than accepted terminology and descriptive focus on their previous experiences. For example, Kate Bornstein is a post-operative male-to-female transsexual who currently identifies as a lesbian, owing to her sexual relationship with a (birth) female, although she has also had relationships with biological and transgender men. However, she chooses to recognise the possibility of her own future identity metamorphoses and incorporates it into her self-description. This is to encourage her own development, and she sometimes identifies herself as 'transgender' to represent this fluidity, or refutes labels in favour of descriptions of her own social roles: what she does rather than who she does it to (1994).[5] This occurs when the constantly altering identities become indefinable in the short-term when the terms have not been ratified to any reasonable extent.[6] The focus on external stimuli can play a direct role in the further development of sexuality and identity. In her "Preface" to *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality* (in Queen and Schimel 1997), Bornstein ponders the personal transformations she would need to make in order to feel comfortable, alluring, and socially acceptable whilst wearing a particularly dazzling scarf. Empirical data cannot factually record the desire to alter the

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[5] While this terminology is necessarily evasive, it becomes necessary to consider the person in light of the physical application of their desires as a method of identification.

[6] Inter-sex is an example of this. Equating not to sexuality but to gender, it came into usage when the terms 'transsexuality' (relating to sex realignment) and 'transgender' (relating to social role) were seen to be inadequate to accurately describe those who did not conform to either definition, but instead whose behaviours and thoughts formed an amalgamation of those considered reflective of both male and female.

persona in the future, and thus cannot truly define an appropriate terminology - other than the trend-based 'trans'. Thus, retaining an overarching referent for the sex and gender non-conformist community is appropriate as it reflects the respondents' overall circumstances.

Of course, this fluidity questions definitions of gender, sexuality and, thus, the validity of the variables within the community sample group of this study. One may suggest lesbian identity should be attributed only to birth females who have had, or who currently enjoy, sexual relations with another birth female. This approach is, however, misleading as it fails to account for personal circumstances, as in the case of one of this thesis' respondents whose youth spent in a small and conservative town curtailed her opportunities to develop lesbian relationships. Such circumstances force definitions beyond physical experience and towards comprehending the extent to which identity can be based on community interactions, such as shared cultural understanding, taste and appearance. For example, in the film *Go Fish!* (Troche 1994) the question is raised as to whether someone engaged in primarily homosexual relationships should review their entire self-perception if they choose to have sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex.

Though it shouldn't be taken in isolation, social perception must be considered when an individual's self-conception is at odds with the commonly accepted representation. Judith Butler (2006) and Kate Bornstein (1994) have both discussed how cultural activation of sexuality is based on signifiers including physical actions and appearance. An individual's identity may not be recognised and activated via others' 'appropriate' behaviour if it is simply not recognised. This can have serious ramifications for establishing the variables in a sample group and for critiquing performances and community interaction. This study includes a male respondent whose physique makes it practically impossible to 'pass' (or be

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recognised and accepted as) female, so he manifests his perception of his femininity through drag performance. Empirically, he would be interpreted as a homosexual drag queen, rather than as a heterosexual female, which, when analysing his performances' social aims, can be wildly misleading, as will be demonstrated in the third chapter of this thesis.

These examples illustrate the complexity of both studying and recording gender and sexuality. To create new terms or use obscure definitions for each individual would cause additional confusion as well as focusing on an unnecessary and possibly inaccurate medicalisation, rather than their work as a performer. It also denies respondents agency in perception of their sexuality by passing the ratification to the external, yet similarly subjective researcher, who has already disrupted the signification process through their mere intervention into the environment. Therefore, while attention is paid to the respondents' present self-definition when it is relevant to their relationship with their audience, it does not necessarily encroach on this study. This is an issue as much about ethics as it is about objectivity. The researcher may be an outsider, and if they query a respondent's self-perception they may cause distress and potentially invalidate the sample by instigating a re-evaluation that may alter the performances, and thus the study itself. As a result of these issues, the referent LGBTQ (the sexuality specific 'lesbian', 'gay', and 'bisexual', and – the open to interpretation and representation – 'trans' and 'queer') will be used to denote all respondents in order to describe their sexualities in an overarching way that reflects their personal choices, unless otherwise stated. This acronym is commonplace yet clunky: it does not readily roll off the tongue. It is, however, simpler than titles that attempt to include the variety within the community in more detail via the addition of further initials that could considerably elongate the thesis itself.

The first of the five chapters of this thesis will provide the studies' basic theoretical framework; as previously stated, drag performance cannot adequately be studied without reference to the genesis of its holistic critical appreciation within Queer Theory. This is the theorisation of the lives of LGBTQ people whose political presence developed from the advocacy movements of the 1960s and can thus claim input from both the academic and social sphere.[7] An understanding of this background is essential to becoming conversant with the subjects within the field.

One of these primary subjects is the theorisation of identity construction which forms the basis for understanding the political implications of the concept of the performative self within society. This, famously, is the subject with which Judith Butler has been associated. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (1993), Butler argues that identities are political as a result of the significations of their social interaction. She further states the self can be consciously represented, limited only by the physical attributes of the individual, which form the semiological working area.[8] Her theory places the personal as political at the heart of cross-dressed performance, and presents the possibility of the changeability of personal representation. This contrasts with other critical thought in the field, for example that of Kate Bornstein. In *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994), Bornstein illustrates in practical terms how the individual can mould or perform their own identity to control their lives, suggesting a greater level of control within the signification chain.[9] The mere use of clothing can illustrate one's precise sexual

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[7] Advocacy movements of the 1960s included the black power movement (Jay and Young 1992).
[8] For an argument against this concept, see Ekins and King (1996).
[9] A particularly explicit demonstration of Bornstein's method of application can also be seen in her preface to *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* (Queen and Schimel 1997).

preferences when connotation systems are developed to enable members of the community to identify each other readily, such as by the use of handkerchief codes (Bornstein 1994 37).

The efficacy of this signification system, and thus the theorem that identity can be consciously constructed, can however be challenged if the signifier's connotations are not perceived by the onlooker in the way intended (Carlson 1998). Misinterpretation is an important consideration when researching the performance of self, particularly when the self is being performed with a political aim in mind. If any party disputes the conceptualisation of the identity presented, they interfere with, and can thus alter, the reception of the performance's intended personal and socio-political purpose (Baker 1994).

Jennie Livingston's film, *Paris is Burning* (1990) exemplifies this scenario. Documenting the lives and performances of homosexual birth males who don costumes to "walk" (or participate) in drag balls in New York, it is probably the key text illustrating the variety within cross-dressed performance, and thus forms a framework against which later performance groups can be compared.[10] The ball participants enter to win trophies and the communities' acclaim for their 'Houses', or adoptive drag family. Alongside 'traditional' drag artists performing as women, categories include 'preppy', 'student', 'executive', 'fem realness' and 'bangee'.[11] As these titles indicate, the balls emphasise the participants'

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[10] Esther Newton's *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* is an essential reference point (Newton 1979) for the analysis of the sheer variety of cross-dressed performers. In addition to her own analysis, Newton's book contains a variety of respondent accounts which convey realistic impressions of the situations and people described. These comparisons are of particular interest for further examination in terms of their differing political implications, as is indicated by the definitions of 'drag queens' and 'female impersonators' that she provides.

[11] "Drag" is the terminology used here, as it reflects the communities' self-naming at the balls. However, several of my respondents (including Kerryn Davey) have posited that these performances would more aptly

replication of socio-economic status – rather than, or in addition to, gender. The key concept is not necessarily 'drag' in the cross-dressing sense of the term, but to take on the guise of another: post-gay drag, a form that allows the genre flexibility. In addition, participants must convey the attitude associated with the persona, alongside the development of any requisite skills. The achievement of convincing replication is defined as 'realness', which Livingston's participant (Dorian Corey) further defines as blending in with heterosexual society by escaping the theorised marginalisation caused by LGBTQ signifiers.

The film has been the subject of much critical discourse. Some feminist critics have interpreted the drag and transgender walkers' actions as misogyny, as demonstrated by Marilyn Frye's statement: "gay man's effeminacy and donning of feminine apparel displays no love of, or identification with woman or the womanly… It is a casual and cynical mockery of women" (quoted in Phelan 1993 162). Frye relates her perspective not only in relation to *Paris is Burning*, but to homosexual men in general. In *The Politics of Reality* (1983) Frye posits that society is phallocentric and that male relationships are profoundly homoerotic, being based on admiration of those whose attributes they consider worthwhile. This suggests that misogynistic perspectives are, ergo, increased when men are homosexual (and thus utterly unattracted to females). In this view, therefore, any utilisation of symbolism connoting the female must be intended for reasons other than gaining or showing respect, as the men would perceive nothing of value in their replication.

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be called female impersonation. For a further discussion of this theory, see the third and fifth chapters of this thesis.

Furthermore, this perspective suggests why the film's respondents may have attracted such vitriolic accusations of misogyny: filming them can be considered a political act. The documentary focuses on the respondents' minority statuses. Their poverty and other hardships engage the viewer's empathy, implying (as a result) that social intervention to alleviate their concerns is in the public interest. As Clarke notes, this is the case with much social documentary:

> Given that many of the topics investigated by social researchers [as social documentarians inevitably are] defined by policy makers as social problems, for which solutions need to be found, it seems reasonable to assume that research evidence will have a positive and direct effect on policy. (Clarke in Gilbert 2005 29)

In light of Clarke's statement, that the film is focused on this group (by an academic and potentially influential person, no less) implies that it is the respondents' situation, and by default they, who are worthy of assistance. To witness the lavishing of such focus on a group that one considers to be not only oppressing another group (particularly when one is part of the latter), but rewarded with comparative fame for actively "[mocking]" them, despite experiencing discrimination themselves, must appear galling indeed.

However, this contrasts against the (perhaps more understandable) perspective that the performers' attempts to utilise their conceptualisation of gender in the drag balls are in the interests of self-improvement (Butler 1993). While the appropriation of a female identity can be construed as misogynistic if positing that a female's sole 'talent' is to utilise her appearance to achieve success, this does not denote that drag performers are themselves misogynistic (although it also does not mean that they are not). It may be the case that this stereotype is the only conception in which the performers can be (real)ised as women. It is

what Marvin Carlson has called a Goffmanesque "management" of identity, where "[those] attempting to divert attention from their stigma" may "present the signs of their stigmatised failing as the signs of another attribute, one that is less significantly a stigma" (Carlson 1998 154).[12] Homosexual males living in a homophobic society with little education or social resources, such as the respondents of *Paris is Burning* (1990), may not easily be able to earn their own money, but if they can appear to be attractive women, they may be able to marry it. For these respondents, gender is not only, as Butler suggests, "a site of phantastic promise as a mythical development process of somehow changing" (1993 130), but also direct action born of the desire to change their circumstances by any physical means available. It is particularly reminiscent of Garber's (1997, first published in 1992) perception of gender as the primary division of social roles. Either way, the vast difference between these perspectives demonstrates the importance of the audience's role in the ratification of the performance. They enable *Paris is Burning* (1990) to be used as a basis of comparison for modern performances that concern the communities' personal and social development, particularly in an era when many view drag performance as having been depoliticised (Garber 1997).

The first chapter of this thesis will eschew the debate concerning whether gender results from essentialist or social influences to instead examine how a modern English drag group's cabaret utilises images that question their own continuously developing gender identities. The images are recognisable to their audiences and allow those assembled to interrogate the types of sexuality and relationships offered through the transcendence of

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[12] For example, respondent performer Anna Glypta, otherwise known as Marcus Rayne, a birth male, has commented that she uses drag (as opposed to female impersonation) as a means to express her femininity (Rayne 2006c). She decided against gender realignment on the basis of her large physique, which she considers would make 'passing' as a female all but impossible. Female pronouns are used here as these are the terms the respondent prefers.

gender and sexuality norms. Comparison to *Paris is Burning* (1990) will, however, reveal that the very functionality of the genders explored requires ratification from the audience in order for the performers' development to continue. In the interests of balance, an analysis of the Duckie Collective will demonstrate how such performances can be 'misinterpreted', but still contribute to gender discourse through their reflection of other linked concepts.

Queer Theory attempts to understand the social context in which the LGBTQ community has become politicised as a result of their identity. *Queer by Choice: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Politics of Identity* (Whisman 1996) concerns the minoritisation of homosexuality, while *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (Jay and Young 1992, originally published in 1972) concerns themes ranging from the rejection of the heterosexual sex-role structure through to 'curative' medical intervention. Implicit in these essays is the attempt of the individual to find their place within society:

> …we could speak of 'gay science', that obligatory existentialism forced on people who must invent themselves…Once one discovers one is gay one must choose everything, from how to walk, dress and talk to where to live, with whom and one what terms. (Edmund White quoted in Higgins 1993 223)

Such accounts illustrate how the social aspects of LGBTQ identity place obstacles in the path of pursuing a 'normal', heterosexual role and life, primarily by questioning the probability of procreation and, thus, the validity of biological imperatives, particularly in post-Christian societies.[13] This can instigate social persecution that highlights the individual's lack of conformity (Butler 1993) and can force them to reconsider their compliance with social expectations and, thus, the overarching question of social purpose.

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[13] See *Middle Sex* (Thomas 2005) for justifications of this categorisation.

The second chapter of this thesis will do no less than refine Queer Theory to define and explore the social role drag performers have, sometimes inadvertently, chosen. It will begin by demonstrating how departure from heteronormative, patriarchal society prompts LGBTQ performers to look beyond Higgins' rather loose existentialism to find alternative role models and behaviours in order to locate and contribute to a community. In *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (1994), Roger Baker offers a detailed history and cross-cultural analysis of cross-dressers whose behaviour has transcended the gender binary. The philosophical implications of this are significant:

> The drag queen has two faces: the sacred and the secular. Her secular mask is comic and allows her to take on the role of the court jester, with privilege to challenge the laws of society and to crash through the boundaries that separate male from female. It is a role that has existed across the centuries, from ancient folkloric festivals that marked the changing seasons to the pantomimes and cabarets of the twentieth century. When Lily Savage or Dame Edna Everage stalk onto the stage and fascinate their terrorised audience they are recreating for us one of the oldest of our totems, becoming emblems of the unseen but ever present tension between order and chaos. (Baker 1994 23)

Presumably this quotation alludes to the "order" of the gender binary system and the "chaos" of the potential fluidity of gender, which suggests that Baker sees these figures as priestesses of this tension, and therefore capable of its control. Referencing the theorisation of gender transcender as great fool purported by Kate Bornstein (1994), the chapter will use anthropological evidence to demonstrate the comparisons of this modern role to that of the shaman, as one who acted to develop their community. In *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994), Bornstein contends that her experience of living outside gender norms demonstrates that those whose identification appears to refute the obligation

of biological imperatives, have the specific social role of demonstrating that sex and gender are in fact mutable.

Furthermore, Bornstein suggests that this places them in a unique position to critique other previously accepted social systems and relay their findings to their communities. She likens the process to shamanic scenarios in which individuals lead their community to philosophical insight.[14] Interestingly, despite the discrepancy between Bornstein's cultural background and that commonly associated with shamanism, there is evidence to support her assertion. Laurence Senelick's piece, "The Sham in Shaman" (2000), describes how sexual non-conformists, and in particular cross-dressers, have led the spiritual lives of their communities.[15] Further research also lends credence to Bornstein's hypothesis. Anthropologists Gmelin, Egeida, and Levi Strauss (Flaherty 1988) illustrate that shamanism is a term so contested, it is most accurately identified by the role of the community leader. The leader's function is to comprehend and advise on all social (and thus gender) perspectives, rather than to advocate a particular belief system. Bornstein (1994) suggests that an essentialist inclination to transgender identification is a prerequisite for such a role. However, with reference to Miller (1996), Brody (1971) Chambers (1933), and Davies (1975), the chapter will demonstrate that while there are many reports of cross-dressers taking a lead in community life, the prerequisite appears to be the willingness to cross the supposed sexual divide. This enables them to transcend their normative role for religious or political purposes, but is not in itself evidence that they considered themselves to be transgender.

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[14] It is not clear whether Bornstein specifically means the tribal shaman, who would seek to gain this information via communication with the spirit world; although she does state that the role was performed by her ancestors (Bornstein 1994).

[15] Senelick also details how cross-dressing forms an essential part of rites-of-passage, the implication being that in these communities growth must be achieved through an understanding of the functions of all gender attributes as symbols of the social whole (2000).

It follows that the shamanic cross-dresser's knowledge is passed back into the community in order to be utilised, as Bornstein's thesis suggests. It is has, however, been argued by critics such as Marjorie Garber (1997) that the proliferation of drag performance has neutered its politically transformative potential. Transvestite comic Chloe Poems, removed from the stage for her own safety during recent Pride celebrations, illustrates the contestability of Garber's assertion. The third chapter will focus on the messages that these LGTBQ shaman convey to their community via performance. For while Poems illustrates that drag can gain the audience's trust before demonstrating acts with overtly political content at a large event, the politics of identity can also offer potential for activism in small communities. As Gilbert's ethnological good-practice guidelines suggest (2005), the variables for study are diverse venues. Their locations ensure their distinct clientele ranges from predominantly heterosexual, through mixed sexuality, to predominantly LGBTQ audiences. This enables each performance to be tailored to the relevant audiences' relationship with hegemonic patriarchy, their interests and their aspirations. At times their approach appears rather didactic, as some of the performances use drag as a method of detailing relationship models that may be appropriate to the audience. Focusing on Maurice Charney's (1980) theorisation of comedy as form of rhetoric, this thesis will show how performers use the device to facilitate the conveyance of their message by demonstrating the interpersonal benefits of the relationship model to the crowd. As per Charney's comedy theories, this enables the audience to learn from, and participate in, the emotion of the sequences, whilst remaining in control of their physicality, thus enabling the longer term contemplation of the performances' message.

Progressing from these small, venue-based performances, the fourth chapter sees the performers expand their shamanic role and investigates the modification of the cabaret's subtext for the wider local community's consumption. In these instances, the cross-dressed performer represents the LGBTQ community's need for a figurehead that can promote their core values, whilst also demonstrating these theorised qualities in a manner accessible to the mainstream. At its most interactive level, this is achieved through the use of the carnival as political theatre. Carnival was, after all, the planned response following The Stonewall Riot that is commonly held to be the genesis of American and English LGBTQ activism (Medhurst and Munt 1997, Jay and Young 1992, O'Murray 1996, and Itzin 1980).[16] It will then reference Ned Rorem (1987) firstly to illustrate how the visual aspects of the carnival, and in particular the image of the drag queen, can affect psychological, and as a consequence, physical change within the locale. This follows from functions and philosophy inherent in medieval carnivals, as fictionalised in the novels of Francois Rabelais, and in critiques of his work such as Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (Iswolsky 1984).[17]

Of particular interest are the theorisation of the grotesque material bodily principle of degradation and renewal, and "crownings" and "uncrownings" of the abject hero, as created

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[16] In his article, "30 Years of Gay Pride" (npg., 2002), Peter Tatchell, an organiser of the first major English LGBTQ rights protest, states that the event was designed to be a "carnival-style parade". The implications of this wording are difficult to qualify as it was written some thirty years after the event and, therefore, raises questions over whether it represents the perception of the event at the time, or whether it is considered appropriate with hindsight. The specific use of the term "carnival" is also problematic, as it is not stated whether it refers to Rabelaisian perception of the Carnival, or is generalised to suggest a street party. There is also no method of discerning whether this is the perception of the whole group or Tatchell himself. However, his articles do include descriptions of the variety of symbolic mechanisms used during the display, suggesting that it is possible that the Rabelaisian carnival may have been chosen as the performance style enabling its participants to subvert cultural norms to make their political point (npg., 2000).

[17] Which are *Gargantua*, *Pantagruel, Le Tiers Livre des faicts et dicts héroïques du bon Pantagruel*, *Le Quart Livre de Pantagruel* and *Cinquisme Live* (Urquhart 1653). That Rabelais was the author of the fifth book has been disputed.

through the concept of loophole wording (Iswolsky 1984 11).[18] These combine to create a liminal state in which everyday social interactions are suspended (Ibid). Bakhtin posits that these attributes ensured the proceedings had a socially levelling aspect which reminded participants of their most common denominators of birth and death, which themselves were inherently linked to the birth of new ideas and people to replace the old. In this sense, the carnival is seen as a mechanism enabling social and philosophical re-evaluation and, thus, the reinvention of the self on a massive scale. With reference to Mary Russo's (1997) theorisation of the female body (and its mythologisation), this thesis will demonstrate how carnivalesque theories can be applied to the body of the drag queen to encourage the rebirth, or entrance, of the carnival viewer into the continuously developing LGBTQ community. Following this, and echoing the transformatory geography of the Rabelaisian carnival, the format of the modern event will be shown to offer liminality enabling gender development, which will be demonstrated with reference to Bornstein's statement:

> More sophisticated virtual realities allow for more opportunities to play […] as well as more sophisticated methods of playing, but any virtual reality is a playing field on which we can rehearse for the future. (1994 139)

In inhabiting the world of the carnival, the participants and performers are all thus 'playing' other existences, which, as the chapter will demonstrate, the route of the performance enables to become a reality (Montgomery 1993).

Carnival does not only encourage the further development of the LGBTQ community; it also aims to provide for their social needs. Effecting socio-political change is a central concern of the carnival, which has otherwise been interpreted as "a kind of safety valve for

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[18] See Chapter Four for a discussion of these terms.

passions the common people might otherwise direct to revolution" (Pomorska in Iswolsky 1984 xviii).[19] As a result, LGBTQ activists have also utilised conventional theatre, agitational propaganda and symbolism to illustrate their concerns regarding health care and legal matters, alongside their suggestions for change. The LGBTQ carnival's political aims are not solely focused on critiquing heterosexual orthodoxy, but instead also consider accepted regimes within the community. This thesis will marry Bakhtin's theories of carnivalesque violence with those of Mike Presdee (2000), who argues that modern civil disorder mirrors the concept, to argue that carnival defies all authority to enable the community to achieve continual reinvention through chastisement of established systems.

The final chapter will examine the culmination of these theories to identify the aims and objectives of televised drag performance, the most widespread interaction between the audience and the cross-dressed performer. Having asserted the political, if sometimes reactionary nature, of the carnival, it will demonstrate that televisual drag performance challenges censure through the advancement of a dialogue that questions otherness itself. Drag performance entered the mainstream via decommissioned Armed Forces veterans' entertainment troupes. Artists such as Danny La Rue dressed as women primarily because of the absence of females on the all-male service tours.[20] Their performances were intended to titillate as well as entertain, and as a result the illusion had to be convincing. Their ability to mimic and project this apparent femaleness demonstrates the malleability of gender roles, albeit while reasserting overarching patriarchal and class-based traditions.

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[19] As was stated by the Commissar of Enlightenment in Russia at the time of Bakhtin. For other examples of this perspective, see Parker, R., "The Carnivalisation of the World", pp. 361-377, and Lancaster, R., "Guto's Performance", pp. 559-574, in Lancaster and di Leonardo (1997).

[20] This also enabled experimentation with the parameters of the performers' own sexualities.

However, rather than merely arguing that the main success of made-for-television drag is the popularisation of cross-dressed performance, it will, moreover, demonstrate its facilitation of a dramatic social education. La Rue popularised the cross-dressed frivolity he termed as being the "comic in a frock" (webpage, npg.), which led the way for the effeminate, yet male, stage personas utilised by entertainers such as Larry Grayson. Grayson's non-masculine, high-camp manner was delivered whilst wearing a normative, traditionally male costume. This questions whether the presentation was of a fictionalised character, while the combination of masculine costume with effeminacy connotes an LGBTQ persona. It increased the identities' acceptability within the mainstream by demonstrating its benefits as entertainment that could adhere to the mainstream's presentational protocols (Dangoor 1993, originally published in 1972). The definition of camp is elusive, yet is essential to understanding Grayson's popularity. It is loosely accepted to mean "homosexual humour and taste" (Newton 1979 3). It is also seen as a tool used by gay men as a

> …survival mechanism in a hostile environment [as] camp answers heterosexual disapproval through a strategy of defensive offensiveness (camp thrives on paradoxes), incarnating the homophobe's worst fears, confirming that not only do queers dare to exist but they actively flaunt and luxuriate in their queerness. (Medhurst and Munt 1997 276)

Medhurst posits that camp is inherently political:

> Camp, above all, is the domain of queens. It is a configuration of taste codes and a declaration of effeminate intent […] It revels in exaggeration, theatricality, parody and bitching. It both vigorously undermines and rigorously reinscribes traditional gender roles. (Ibid)

This definition suggests that a prime function of camp is to undermine and revise all categorisation.[21] Most critics agree that camp can be wickedly funny as its juxtaposition of incongruities renders its subjects humorous:

> The fourth characteristic of camp is its humour [….] The comic element is inherent in the formal properties of irony […] But in order for an incongruous contrast to be ironic it must, in addition to being comic, affect one as 'painful' – though not so painful as to neutralise the humour. It is sufficient that sympathy is aroused for the person, thing or idea that constitutes the target of an incongruous contrast. (Babuscio 1977 47)

The attempt to understand incongruity through the pleasant medium of humour may contribute to camp's continuing popularity, and thus, that of drag as a primary vehicle of its performance. In times of social upheaval, humour allows people to comprehend change within an emotionally safe environment that enables the release of tension.

Furthermore, Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1997) argues that a major effect of drag performance has been the dissemination of the knowledge, signs and signification of the mutability of gender identity to a mainstream audience. This, combined with cultural shifts such as the civil rights movement, has changed modern society, as is evident from the increased malleability of the gender/sexuality role system. The chapter will demonstrate that this metamorphosis has enabled drag to move beyond gender critique towards other social issues. Social class is a predominant theme of Paul O'Grady's drag creation, Lily Savage. Savage's style capitalises on camp humour's use of double entendres, while O'Grady presents Savage as what Baker (1994) calls a 'male actress' in order to gain the audience's empathy for the character. This enables him to

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[21] Which is at odds with Newton's suggestion that the camp performer's objective is to actively mock the physical, albeit while also investing in its promotion (Newton 1979).

illustrate the difficulties caused by poverty while suggesting the individual's personal responsibility to seek to improve their situation rather than using these circumstances to validate antisocial behaviour. Yet while La Rue and O'Grady underline issues of social concern, their performances do not offer solutions.

One programme that does so is the sketch show, *Little Britain* (2003). The programme is presented in a documentary style – a medium that invites its audience to question whether the people and social issues illustrated are indicative of a society in decline, or are a paranoid illusion created by mass media that actually obscures the norm (McQuail 1997). The audience's task is complicated as the characters are comic and engaging. This ambivalent presentation confuses the moral judgement the audiences are invited to pass, depending on whether or not they approve of the characters' actions. In addition, the actors portray characters such as Vicky Pollard in drag in order to illustrate her potential to physically evolve alongside the landscape in a society with constantly adjusting social boundaries and expected behaviours. The characters are also intentionally grotesque, which follows Bakhtin's (Iswolsky 1984) conception of the material bodily principle in stating that physical formation is inherently dependant on interaction, thus asking the viewer to question the behaviour of the 'moral' characters as well as the 'immoral' ones. The characters represent Judith Halberstam's (2000) theorisation of horror as the creation of new bodies and, thus, civilisations. They allow moralistic voyeurism and condemnation, as well as the vicarious experience of 'anti-social' ideation. The social importance of this is suggested by Stephen King's (1991) theory that anti-social vicarious experience allows the viewer to understand and experience the desire to experiment with ambiguous or mutating social boundaries in order to ascertain whether their urges can be subdued or incorporated into the society, should they be encountered in real life.

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Over and above the popularity of individual characters, the focus of *Little Britain* (2003) is the representation of an array of different social types, from the teenage delinquent through to respectable citizens. The chapter will argue that at the heart of the programme is a deconstruction of the concept of social otherness itself. By questioning the application of traditional behaviours in a changing environment, *Little Britain* first promises to stigmatise otherness before showing each character as being 'other' to another as a result of the social changes that ensure identities cannot remain stable. Furthermore, the characters will be seen to exemplify Halberstam's (2000) vampiric paradigm, in which their development is governed by the public consumption of their associated media. This ensures that the audience that watches and, thus, consumes (Little) Britain replicates characters from the programme, and is thus reabsorbed into its framework as a quasi-documentary of 'the norm'. The programme's initial conclusion is, thus, that social mobility can be seen as advantageous rather than as the cause of its destruction, and indeed that the true horror of the programme is only the perception of the social norm, which is based on idealised and unrealistic views of natural human behaviour. The continual redevelopment of these social expectations, coupled with the concern over whether individuals will adapt or fail to survive (and ultimately disrupt) the societies' functionality, are the primary concerns of the programme and indeed of Queer Theory itself. As the narrator's upbeat and often truthful asides demonstrate, *Little Britain* (2003) suggests that not only can cultural change be positive, but that it should also be celebrated as a rejuvenation of English eccentricity that is aware of its power and its own legitimisation.

There are, however, a number of practical, methodological, ethical and theoretical difficulties to consider when studying drag performance. Perhaps the most pressing

obstacle is gaining appropriate data during research. If primary observations are to be those of the researcher, as is necessary in a Doctoral thesis, one inevitably has to restrict the sample size, while at the same time realising that the study of a diffuse social topic also leads to difficulties in the imposition of scientific variables. The sample was, thus, initially restricted by focusing the time variable on performances that occurred during the autumn of 2006. Thus, the performances reflected the same mainstream cultural climate, as well as ensuring they could be seen by the researcher. To further restrict this sample, one primary performance from a variety of pre-identified venue types was analysed. This approach is beneficial as it enables representation of the spectrum of the performances within the community, from Las Vegas-style cabaret, through performances specifically interrogating gender, and to those whose primary aim is to allow the community to celebrate themselves, using drag as a rallying point or form of ratification.[22] It demands a lack of sectarianism and promotes the scientific study of the phenomenon on its own terms. Moreover, it enables the study to take note of other critical perspectives without becoming slave to them, or indeed the image and ideals of LGBTQ identity that they suggest. It is also particularly important when comparisons to secondary data are necessary, as this prevents the study from attempting to remain within one cannon or performance style that may have been formulated in a vastly different cultural landscape with different objectives that may not represent the modern LGBTQ community.

After establishing the sample groups, attention must be paid to the challenges of data collection. This incorporates records of interviews with the performer respondents and the

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[22] An alternative approach was utilised by Verta Taylor and Layla Rupp for their study of the 801 Girls' cabaret (2005). While their long-term ethnography offers more detail on the community, it is selective to the extent that themes cannot then be generalised to the rest of the community. Long-term involvement also increases the possibility of ethical dilemmas, as Rupp and Taylor's study, in which they offered one participant a financial incentive and jeopardised their relationship with the rest of the community, demonstrates.

details of the performances themselves. While permitted discussions can take place in a quiet environment away from the performance, or clarifications gained after the event if this is not possible, the adequate representation of the productions poses other challenges. This issue cuts to the heart of the notion of objectivity, and surprisingly has implications for all of the performances' media. The performances studied here are roughly equally distributed between video recordings made by external agencies and those viewed live and recorded in note form during participant observation. This study will demonstrate that neither the live nor the recorded performances are able to capture a true representation of the community, but that this realisation actually engenders a multifaceted approach that prompts more holistic impressions.

Drag performance is heavily based on interaction between the audience and the performer, from the nuancing of particular lines, such as in The Birdcage's rendition of "A Lil' Ole Bitty Pissant Country Place" (Hall 1982), to direct audience involvement as witnesses in Chloe Poems' performance at the Citizen 32 (npg.) poetry event. The audience's interaction becomes a part of the performance as a result of the community dynamics. It would, thus, be essential to focus on the audience's reactions as much as the performers' themselves, as this would elucidate the customer base for whom the performances are devised. One would need a large amount of equipment to record this data, making it unmanageable for a solo researcher, and creating an alien environment focused on 'recording' and 'performance' that may actually skew the communities' interaction. A happy medium between accurately recording the environment and protecting the validity of the research must be found. This can be achieved using ethnography and, in particular, participant observation. This approach accepts that not all interactions within the performance can be captured, and instead aims to provide a consciously subjective, yet physically accurate understanding of

the atmosphere through personal involvement both with the performance and with other audience members.

This process also accepts that it would be not only impossible, but ethically dubious, to attempt to gain the audiences' individual viewpoints during the performance, due to the logistics of accurately surveying a room full of inebriated people in a noisy environment in which their respondent rights could not be satisfactorily explained. It also accounts for the inability to present an absolutely objective viewpoint of how the performance, with all of its intricate interactions, was received, and whether indeed this perception is part of an evolving process. Reflexivity enables the researcher to realise the subjectivity of their data set, particularly in an area as individualistic as comic appreciation, and thus use other forms of data to attempt to falsify their findings. This data can then be triangulated against information given by the respondents during interviews, reviews of the performance found on the internet, notes taken out of public view, the use of a camera and Dictaphone to record the scenes when the performers are formally introduced to the audience, and through discrete photography during the performances themselves. This can be considered undisruptive to the social environment as respondents stated that such behaviour was common.[23] It provides a record of the evening's performances, as well an incorporating an impression of the atmosphere and the audiences' reactions to it.

A similar mindset must be employed when analysing the apparently factual observations offered by continuously recorded performances, such as those of Chloe Poems (npg.). While recordings show the presentation of the performance and allow in-depth study of the

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[23] To protect the rights of the clients present, the venue was later mapped with the help of respondents, and no individuals' names or images were kept.

action as text, objectivity is belied by the possibility of editing and the perspective of the camera. There is also uncertainty surrounding audience reactions if indications of these are limited to sound alone, particularly in instances where the camera focuses on the performer for long periods. In these scenarios, the lack of data can be somewhat circumnavigated via internet-based research on local discussion groups and interviews with the artists themselves, who may have radically different aims for the performance than that of the criteria generally adhered to by the mainstream, and which can itself impact on the study.

The objective recording of the performative experience is infinitely complicated by the introduction of advanced ethics into disciplines such as drama. This is particularly the case in this study as a result of its use of Queer Theory, which is a heavily politicised movement within academia. Gender performance has frequently been used to publicise and challenge the perceived injustice faced by those who may have faced discrimination. As a result, a primary concern of modern ethical involvement is the effect of the research on the respondents. There exists a tension between ensuring that participants comprehend the possible impact their involvement in research may have on their lives at the outset, whilst also respecting them as intelligent individuals who do not need to be, for want of a better word, 'nannied'. It is one thing to agree to discuss one's life and concerns, entirely another to have one's theatrical work or indeed the very 'validity' of one's very gender presentation scrutinised. It is the researcher's responsibility to conduct a rigorous investigation whilst ensuring that no emotional distress is caused by focusing unduly on the politics of victimisation and segregation.

As this thesis shall demonstrate, respondents can feel intimidated by the research process or feel that academic observation may attempt to ratify their perspectives as 'gospel truth'.

They may be concerned about potential alienation, as their community has been the subject of scientific study and, thus, may resent anticipated co-optation into what has historically been a subservient dialogue. This perspective suggests the academic study of drag performance alters its meaning for the performers, removing their control of its signification. This is the exact reverse of what a potentially empowering process that enables the community to develop should entail.[24] However, a letter explaining the subject area, respondents' rights, and the reiteration that the respondent may ask for final approval on any document in which they feature can be used to avoid this fracture. Not only does this safeguard the researcher by minimising the risk of respondents leaving the project, it also encourages the development of an honest and mutually investigative relationship.

However, the main methodological difficulty associated with this research is its formation as an extended and in-depth study of the performance of a phenomenon with a wide variety of forms. It presents a challenge to the researcher's time, experience and knowledge, but in doing so essentially forces them to learn to assimilate vast amounts of data in order to identify areas of further study, as well as understanding paradigm shifts.

A range of technical skills must also be developed, ranging from literary criticism necessary to examine performance poetry, to the development of skills in ethnography. In the latter instance, this presents the challenge to observe and record data presented by the former instance without constraining further investigation by the hasty development of theory, all the while ensuring that respondents' rights are safeguarded at all times. Drag

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[24] The management staff of one major venue approached in advance as a potential participant refused the researcher attendance as they stated their event, held during Gay Pride political demonstrations, was intended to be "fun and not taken seriously at all" (2006). The venue will remain anonymous as it declined to participate in the study.

performance takes place in working locations which make data collection during 'dress rehearsal' impossible. However, these obstacles strengthened the study. The vast array of background research that occurred before the field work eased the development of the thesis by enabling the researcher to anticipate thematic links. It was also surprisingly useful whilst developing a relationship with the respondents, as shared interests facilitated the development of relationships that explored how they viewed drag holistically, as a part of their lives rather than in isolation from it. It also ensured that conversation was not limited to drag performance, and thus did not become overbearing. This eased the respondents' pressure to disclose, and enabled the researcher to discard the 'academic personae'. This established an equal relationship where respondents felt able discuss their performances knowing the researcher had knowledge of the style and, thus, did not require elongated expositional information, but was interested in the breadth of their experiences.

The diversity of subjects featured here demonstrates the challenge of comprehending drag as a performative phenomenon combining inter-related disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy, gender theory and theatre. The critical texts and performances suggest that the malleability of sex and gender roles leads to new areas of investigation of the self. This concept has been brought into public discourse via the use of camp and drag as political theatre which can inform mainstream social debate as a result of their popularity. By demonstrating the continuous development of modern drag performance both by individuals and groups working to provide focal points in their communities, the thesis will illustrate how drag can be hypothesised as a tool facilitating an examination of the legitimacy of hegemonies.

Chapter One: Which Identity?

> [The] experiences and behaviours [of cross-dressers] are made sense of in terms of the deconstructions of postmodernist cultural theory rather than from the standpoint of the experiences of cross-dressers and sex-changers themselves. In consequence, these writings have yet to make a substantial impact on the subjective experience of gender blending. (Ekins and King 1996 5)

This chapter will examine how contemporary drag performance has been used by performers to examine their conceptualisation of theirs and their communities' possibilities of gender identity. As the Ekins and King's passage suggests, academic debates on the subject have tended to focus on its theoretical application. This is particularly the case in respect of the work of the leading theorist, Judith Butler. In their most basic form, Butler's theories contend that gender identity is developed through social interaction, and that its effect is therefore open to adjustment. While this may seem an accessible enough premise, a number of academics have confessed to finding her work, such as *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (1993) and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (2006), "demanding",[25] and it is, therefore, understandable that it may not be the first choice for the coffee table or indeed for wider consumption. This could, in turn, theoretically limit its influence. Nevertheless, the term 'drag', the performed phenomenon, and the communities who practice it have long been in flux, and Butler's work can, however, provide a theoretical framework through which the development of gender identity can be examined.

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[25] As stated on Margaret Whitford's review on the book's back cover. *Philosophy and Literature* journal awarded Butler the first prize in its fourth "Bad Writing Competition" (npg.) which prompted her to contribute the reply "A Bad Writer Writes Back" to *The New York Times* (1999).

Focusing on a case study of a modern drag troupe, the chapter will begin by proposing how the increasing acceptance of some sexualities in fact challenges the potential of LGBTQ identity. It will then utilise Butler's theories of censorship to demonstrate how the cabaret sessions that formed the case study became a "cultural echo chamber" (King 1991 72) presenting stereotypes that facilitate the critique of behaviour models that can challenge sexual preconceptions, thus enabling the performers to review their conception of their sexual and gender identities as well as their place in society. For, while drag is historically associated with direct action aiming towards the alleviation of group oppression (as was the case in the riot and subsequent parade that is associated with the Stonewall Inn), it will be shown to be increasingly linked with politics with a small 'p', the personal aspirations of the participants.

The chapter will start with an observation, followed by an assertion that cuts to the heart of much of the analysis contained in this thesis. The use of drag performance as an expression of the individual's personal perspectives, or politics, rather than as a rallying action, is not limited to economically deprived cultures such as that featured in Livingston's documentary, *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990).[26] In addition, as that film showed, drag is no longer limited to the imitation of a narrow gender stereotype, such as representations of female singers or 'divas', but instead can encompass social roles, becoming what is known as post-gay drag. This alteration of focus enables participants to question their gender identity in relation to the social norm most applicable to them. While this would appear to offer the performer amazing freedom via the potential to sidestep gender as the

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[26] "Drag" is the terminology used here, as it reflects the communities' self-naming at the balls. However, several of my respondents, including Kerryn Davey, have posited that these performances would more aptly be called female impersonation. For a further discussion of this theory, see the third and fifth chapters of this thesis.

performance's primary concern, it also creates the paradoxical crisis at the centre of modern drag.

This crisis results directly from the cultural schism found in modern drag performance, caused by its communities' expectations as a result of its history as a performance of resistance in The Stonewall Riots, and its present acceptance as mainstream entertainment.[27] These contrasting expectations make for uneasy bedfellows. The latter scenario is a product of a cultural climate with an increasing perception of homosexuality as an acceptable difference and where gender expectations have been reconfigured in the popular imagination.[28] Furthermore, the expectation of entertainment spectacle that results from the latter scenario promotes a situation in which it cannot be assumed that the performance is representative of the performer. As a result of these contrasting backgrounds, the concepts of performer's self, the character they present, and self-referentiality become blurred. This leads to the critical paradox: the purpose of drag. For while many modern drag performances can be interpreted as relating to the politics of gender dialogue (issues in which the respondents express an interest), its performers often refute this analysis with the claim that the presentations are intended as light-hearted entertainment only. The former outcome suggests a mutually interrogative process in which the perspectives of both the audience and the artists are potentially changed, the latter a finished product that is presented to the audience for their gratification.

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[27] It is interesting to note that thesis respondent, Anthony Rose, will be seen to bridge this entertainment/politics divide. For while his performances will be seen to be informed by his social politics, he has stated (2006) that he performs in drag primarily for the money and out of loyalty to the venue, although he would be amenable to perform at other venues on a one-off basis.
[28] Figures as diverse as actor-comedians Graham Norton and Danny La Rue have ensured that the conceptualisation of the outrageous and the theatrical has evolved, as detailed in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

A further issue that must be considered is the implications of discussing this schism, and indeed the purpose of drag, whilst considering British drag performance in the light of a body of primarily American academic analysis. While an increasing a number of English academics are making strides within this field, Queer Theory is still often perceived as being dominated by American scholars. This has major implications for this study's fieldwork, as some of the theoretical frameworks used to elucidate these performances originally commented on a vastly different culture, such as the work of Butler (1993).

The communities that much American theory critiques and the ones that this thesis discusses are very different. Where the respondents of *Paris is Burning* were often ethnically Latina or African American, experienced extreme poverty, sometimes committed crimes to alleviate their hardships, and included a number of pre-operative transsexuals, all of this study's respondents are white, earning adequate incomes, and live as the gender they were assigned at birth when they are not performing. Furthermore, *Paris is Burning* was filmed when LGBTQ identities were far less accepted by mainstream society and, thus, the communities lived more closely together for mutual support. This is in contrast to the level of tolerance regardless of 'safety in numbers' that is an expectation for many LGBTQ people in England today.

The locale and cultural history of the community is also of importance. The disparity between these communities ensures that the content of their performances are different in that the 'rehearsal for the outside world' is not as literally translated as for the respondents in England as for those in *Paris is Burning*. A number of *Paris is Burning's* respondents adopt their performance roles permanently, apparently because of the relative safety offered by their 'drag houses' found in a large city inhabited by diverse and like-minded

individuals. In contrast, while Tony Rose, a drag queen (based at the @D2 nightclub in Nottingham) England, may experiment with his sexuality and gender role whilst in drag, he would not wear the items outside of the performance context. This is partially because they are not part of his personal style and partially because he does not live or work solely within the LGBTQ community. Indeed, there are few places in England (cities such as London and Brighton) that incorporate numerically significant, more visible LGBTQ communities, and as a result the communities that do exist across the country tend to be rather more subdued, more 'British', if you will. A comparative stroll near Brighton seafront and Leeds' Briggate confirms this. While American performers are generally more visually and thematically overt than British performers, similar 'flamboyance-variance' can be found within England itself as a result of the varying cultural disparities. Specific geographical location, though contributory as a result of its history and potential position on the landscape, is not necessarily the prime factor for performative difference.

Drag performance also contains themes that are trans-national. The focus on the search for understanding of identity and desire, for instance, has as much importance in the performances of Davey as for Bornstein, as both performers have stated. The divergence is on a surface level – the different ways in which they perform their art, and whether they portray it primarily as entertainment or as a personal-political statement.

The tug of war over whether the performers conceptualise drag as representing either entertainment or politics is evident at the predominantly LGBTQ club @D2 (in Nottingham, England). It can firstly be seen in terms of how the venue and its performers may be interpreted, and, therefore, the type of production the troupe may be expected to mount. There is a case for performance as political action. The venue's performers are

former bar staff and community members, rather than visiting drag artists. This implies the show's homo-political credentials.[29] Their participation suggests drag's roots and routines are based on defence mechanisms for surviving in a potentially hostile parent culture. It is, thus, an essentially educational dialogue, and it is (to an extent) these roots, or sexual types, that the performers must be seen to produce in order to be seen to be continuing to provide LGBTQ entertainment at a LGBTQ venue. Additionally, new material must be developed to appeal to, and bolster LGBTQ audiences who, as respondent Samuel Ball (known professionally as Sam Buca) comments, "have seen it before" (Ball 2006).[30]

The contrasting perspective states that the venue's prime concern is to provide entertainment appealing to a broad range of customers. In natural opposition to the 'drag as political action' argument, this perspective begins from the standpoint of challenging the performances' very right to represent radical LGBTQ political ideology. At least one performer at the venue is commonly known to have engaged in heterosexual relationships before self-defining as homosexual (Davey 2006h). This questions the perception of homosexuality within the venue as stable, and implies that all of the performers may traverse the boundaries of sexual identity.[31] Indeed, notions of transversible identity may be expanded to question the very presence of an essentialist homosexuality. Kerryn Davey is a biological female lesbian who is a 'bio-queen' performing in feminine drag. Unlike her co-performers, Davey's primary character, Mingeeta (pronounced 'Minge-eater') Lickalotopus

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[29] For detailed information and analysis of @D2's drag cabarets and performance space, see Chapter Three (where it is compared with other venues in terms of community impact) of this thesis.

[30] It is interesting to note that Ball, an artist connected to The Birdcage, but who also works on a solo basis, states that he is hired more by heterosexual venues who want to see performances that are "out of the ordinary" (2006).

[31] This may be particularly the case with Rose, as a significant proportion of the regular audience, seated close to the stage are, according to Davey, heterosexual females who form his unofficial fan club, and attend in the hope of sexual relations with him. That members of this community appear to doubt the authenticity of his sexuality may act as a constraint on the way in which he presents as a homosexual man.

mirrors her life as she is identified as a lesbian during the commentary and in promotional material for the venue, while no references are made to the males' sexuality, leaving the suggestion of an unanswered question that may undermine their status at the venue.[32] This is the case particularly when the performers do not explicitly reference their homosexuality, and they are perceived purely in their performative context within this outrageous environment, where a mixed-sexuality door policy directly contests its label as a LGBTQ space.[33]

In this vein, the potential association of the performer with the heterosexual parent culture retains the possibility of conforming to a heterosexual model, even if this is extremely unlikely. Indeed, Garber (1997) has commented that drag performance shed some of its political implications when it became mainstream entertainment, which television personality and drag queen, RuPaul, has attributed to perceived desexualisation of the performers ("RuPaul", npg.). This latter position could be clarified to suggest that the lack of exotic sexualisation of the performers contributes to any apparent 'heterosexualisation' (Ibid).[34] It impacts on their comfortable presentation of their sexuality, as well as their performance within a drag context. Not only must they decide whether to perform to entertain or to inform, their very performances of self are also fractured and, to an extent, 'dequeered'. And while their venue is partly aimed to cater for the LGBTQ community, the admission of heterosexuals could be interpreted as the intention to use their movement's art form in the services of integration into the local community. The venue could, thus,

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[32] The name is a reference to her lesbian identity. 'Minge' is a slang term for the vagina, and, thus, her name is descriptive of lesbian oral sex.

[33] Indeed, performers such as Danny La Rue effectively hid their sexuality by appearing in male clothes at the end of each show.

[34] As Rose has commented, the issue of sexualisation remains as the performer is still a male wearing a dress (Rose 2006).

potentially be considered to have a remit to act as an entertainment provider that can appear LGBTQ friendly and risqué, yet with the proviso that the presentation is essentially unthreatening to mainstream culture.

In spite of space's apparently conflicting demands, the performers are the source material and are at liberty to control the drag production's aims and objectives.[35] Nevertheless, the dilemma of the opposing expectations clearly impacted on them and presented them with a challenge with which they displayed a distinct unease. The difficulties presented by the contested space are compounded by the use of their bodies as the site of potential gender performance, which naturally makes their presentation a very personal affair, and brings with it further challenges. Rose posited drag as being "football for gay people" (2006), thus citing it as an integral aspect of LGBTQ culture, rather than simply alluding to its presentation of risqué comedy. By referencing football, he could be seen to suggest drag's popularity is a celebration of social identity, in the same way that football followers cheer their community's team, know their history and famous players, and follow their progress. In contrast, however, though some performers have studied the art's heritage, the respondents appeared unaware of drag's history as a method of questioning social norms. This appeared rather strange, given the amount of community media attention the subject continues to receive. Moreover, each respondent appeared uneasy when asked directly about what they felt their performances signified, stating the aim was purely to provide entertainment.[36]

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[35] In contrast to other venues such as The Birdcage where the style and flamboyance of performances was controlled by the commitment to provide entertainment to appeal to specific community sectors.
[36] The individual cabarets are discussed in detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

However, it was notable that their answers altered when asked the questions at different points in the interview.[37] Maddison, in particular, stated that he aimed only to entertain, before later stating that he hoped his audiences could learn from his performances (Maddison 2006a, b and c). While this may indicate that they were initially too nervous to proffer 'serious' analysis of their performances' meanings to an academic who may critique them, or maybe that they were simply unused to vocalising their views, there is reason to believe their answers were conditioned by whether they were in environments where they were confident their comments would be understood. Their conceptualisation of their group fluctuated when they described each other to outsiders. However, their occasional reluctance to elucidate their situations in detail did not appear to be based on a requirement for the researcher's complete intellectual comprehension, nor the lack of appropriate vocabulary through which to clarify their arguments, but on the need for visual assurance from the researcher that they were understood empathetically. The researcher felt impelled to demonstrate understanding of the context by responding in a similar manner, nodding her head and laughing to indicate that both the comic and serious implications had been understood, before the conversation could proceed in the terms of the situation stated. In non-performance contexts, each respondent frequently described both themselves and the company using different names – on occasions using their given names, on others the names of their primary drag characters. Their character titles are bestowed performatively, with theatrical gestures and pronounced elocution; they constitute the blurring of boundaries between the performer and character, and, at the same time, are signals to invite the interviewer's participation in witnessing the 'play'.

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[37] A semi-structured interview was developed and a number of the questions from it were put to the respondents several times in different surroundings with others present to establish whether their answers remained the same or changed.

This suggested a potential lack of clarity in the motivating force behind each performance, and this complication can be elucidated by Butler's comments on the medical attribution of gender that occurs at birth:

> The naming is at once the setting of a boundary and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. The matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the "human". Consider the medical interpellation […] which shifts an infant from an "it" to a "she" or a "he", and in that naming, the girl is "girled", bought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that "girling" of the girl does not end there, on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalised effect. (1993 7-8)

This notional interpellation is significant because the respondents' primary knowledge of each other, and, thus, their social interaction, is in a context where their genders are constantly refigured by performing as both male and female. This affects their relations and self-conceptualisation when away from the environment. While referring to each other as having genders that alternate between their performance alter egos and their non-drag personas, they were able to refute ideations of social purpose, whilst also using these characters' connotations of the theatrical fantasy to ensure commentary and gender play were not only permissible, but expected, and the more comparatively outrageous – the better.

This establishes the central theme of the modern venues examined in this thesis, the development, refusal and metamorphosis of identity. After all, what could be better than the use of a fantasy persona to vocalise ideas so deeply unpopular (regardless of their legitimacy) as to seriously consider the implications of LGBTQ sexuality in front of a drunken crowd theoretically looking for light-hearted entertainment?

This contradiction, that the performers claim to believe entertainment to be paramount, and yet appear to design their performances for educational or activist purposes, is explicitly demonstrated by Davey's comments:

> Politically [drag] has no impact, no more than a light-hearted sitcom would […] to be fair we're not trying to make political statements – we might be making observations and satirical comments about life, you know? But that's not going to change anything. It's purely about entertainment, and then there may well be people who tell you they're doing it for a greater purpose, to change people's opinions, to bring tolerance and stuff like that, and maybe that's how they feel, but perhaps they might need the reality check that people don't come to be converted or to have their opinions changed, they come to have a good time. And if you get more out of it than that then, brilliant, but people shouldn't fool themselves that they're making great political statements with drag and everything. You know, it's not what's happening. You know, they're entertaining people and that's it really. (Davey 2006a)

It will become apparent that the satire they use in their performances is at times intended as a critique that invokes shame on the person satirised, suggests areas for their improvement, and, thus, aims to affect personal change in line with politicised goals. Yet it cannot be disputed that these performers also genuinely intend to provide their audiences with the most polished and entertaining show they can offer. This juxtaposition of the serious with the fantastic offers the performers something further. While the fantastical elements enable them to overtly refuse to label their performances as serious, political, or as conveying 'meaning', and as a result to state that audiences are not interested in any message, the performers are, in turn, providing themselves with a space where they can truly experiment. Unlike other performance groups, their 'entertainment' tag releases them from the burden of expected innovation, which can be argued as a major factor in performance group The Duckie Collective's programme. As a result, the performers at @D2 are free to use the

broad scope of imagery found within drag to develop their performances at a rate that facilitates their personal development, rather than the other way around.

It is, therefore, logical that they utilise the cabaret style of drag performance. Strictly speaking, the style originated in the English Music Hall and was a mixture of songs, dances and skits that were developed to entertain the working classes, some of which were performed in drag (Kift 1996). They were often satirical, which gave them an easily appreciable comic appeal that, in turn, enabled the use of thematic material that might otherwise prove either too serious or controversial for the audience. Moreover, the use of comic forms, rather than a particular cultural milieu, provides the performers with a huge variety of scenarios and perspectives on which to draw whilst performing and, thus, formulating their identities.

However, the respondents' evidence suggests that the politicisation of drag performance at a grass-roots level remains so unpopular as to necessitate even further devices to prevent them from appearing to emanate from the performers' personal intent. The performances are roughly divisible into two categories: those that are performed by the artists' main characters and marked as such by an appropriate costume, and those which appear to be performed as a different character for the cabaret proper. On occasion, the primary characters' performances are limited to a hostess role involving traversing the venue to bolster the atmosphere, while the song-specific cabaret characters are delineated by different costumes. Following the cabarets, the performers reappear in their primary character's garb. These character types will not be analysed separately due to the overlap of imagery and performance between them. On occasions, such as in the performance of the song "Hermaphrodite" (Lynch 2000), the performer's primary character will guest in a

cabaret number because they are appropriate for the piece. At times the audience's perception may differ from the performer's, for example where performers such as Davey perform their cabaret as an extension of their primary character, and an indication of their own perspectives.

Davey has commented that she believes the enthusiastic reception of her performances suggests that she is contributing to the perception that many social boundaries are increasingly considered to be more fluid. We may then question whether or not drag performance has anything further to teach either its audiences or its performers as a result of the comment it offers. As stated earlier, concepts of LGBTQ discovery through performance are considered by its performers to be in crisis. The contradiction to this pessimistic state of affairs can be seen in the individuals' performances, which question sexual identities in the context of other social apparatus, such as class.[38] While the performers in Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990) use gender to transverse their social class to escape poverty, the performers of @D2 initially focus on transcending class divisions to concentrate on the treatment of gender and other issues in wider society. By denying the necessity to be explicit in their performances of sexualities and 'drag', they are enabled to perform a wider range of cultural dialogue.[39]

On first impulse, @D2's satire can most readily be interpreted as a critique of easily understood targets that have links to gender, though not necessarily to LGBTQ identity. This is a common factor in much drag performance. The performers' aims are effectively hidden within gimmicks that appear at first glance to be little more than crude sexual

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[38] For a discussion of how social class impacts on LGBTQ identities, see Butler (1997b).
[39] Their names, given to them by the lead artist, CherAround (respondent Maddison), are sometimes related to aspects of gender performance, as is the case with Davey.

exploitation – such as the use of the false penis in "Hermaphrodite" (Lynch 2000).[40] They are often exhibited through the performers' own characteristics, which, in the case of Rose, is his self-confessed rudeness. This manifests chiefly through the personality of his primary character, Claudia Shirtlifter, who he describes as "the most evil of all the drag queens" and "always [looks] angry" (2006), which is emphasised by a black wig and eyebrows, and severe lipstick.[41] His personal perspectives appear to transfer into his cabaret performances, and were particularly evident during a joint cabaret with Davey, which was a parody of the Robbie Williams song, "Millennium" (Williams 1999). The performance aimed to chide the singer's self-obsession. The performative 'rudeness' was highlighted by the costume and performance, in which Rose portrayed an older version of Williams, complete with paunch and excessively theatrical dancing.

Consequently, the performance could be interpreted as a critique of the masculine conceptualisation of identity, as both performers wore the style of trousers and tight, white t-shirts favoured by the singer, while Rose also wore a suit jacket. In the context of a drag performance (connoted by Rose's 'drag' eye make-up), Davey stated that the desired effect was to critique the benefits of utilising socially accepted notions of an idealised masculinity as a promotional tool, to the exclusion of other gender attributes. The effect appeared to be recognised by the audience as soon as the music began to play.[42] Rose portrayed the older Williams as being no longer aware of the qualities he had originally presented, and as a

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[40] It was noticeable that Rose's (2006) descriptions of his acts came across as far more risqué than his performances, though the content of the acts that were not seen by the interviewer at the time may obviously vary from the theory stipulated.

[41] Davey has commented that the drag performers at the venue also mock female representation, but that this is because "in drag you take the piss out of everything, so to exclude it would be worse than to take the piss, you know? Because you're doing the same for everyone" (Davey 2006a).

[42] Although she later contradicted this statement to say that the performance was an attack on Williams' character rather than his gender representation (Davey 2006h), it is suggested that their stage presence implied it was his characteristic gender representation of cock-sureness that they were critiquing.

result became a parody of his former self. As a result, Rose had queered a previously 'straight' figure by displaying the gulf between being male and appearing male with 'feminine' qualities that are denied by performing in a masculine fashion, particularly as a male - whose drag context feminises him playing a man alongside Davey, a female playing a less visibly gender-constructed man who was simply being himself.

Davey (left) and Rose perform their Robbie Williams parody, "Millennium".

Alternatively, in "Hermaphrodite" (pronounced 'Hermaphroditey', Lynch 2000) the very basis of gender norms were realised through play. As Davey comments, "[the] song is a love song sung by a guy about his lover. He is a normal guy who just happens to have fallen in love with a transvestite – it's not a fetish or anything" (2006e). The singer's 'normal guy' status is established through the use of a cowboy hat and chequered shirt. In this instance, Rose's act as was at once 'masculine' and 'feminine' as 'Hermaphrodite', as he combined submissiveness, indicated by a slightly lowered head and angling the body slightly towards Davey, with a movement style similar to stalking, where he moved slowly in an arc around her possessively, eyeing her intently, as if asserting his property rights

over her while she serenaded him. The lyrics reiterate that not only is the singer aware that his lover acts how a male is expected to behave ("she watches football"), but also suggest a bewildered attempt to reassert masculinity by being in control and at ease with the situation ("some things are white / some things are black / some girls wear make-up / mine shaves her back" Lynch 2000). However, as the title of the song indicates, the notion that gender is conceived now as diffuse was played out in mid-song, when Hermaphrodite opened her skirts to reveal a fake penis, which she then held, appearing to masturbate, before moving across the stage to simulate anal intercourse on Davey. It is important to note that this was a relatively realistic penis, indicating the real possibility of a physiological male indulging in transvestism. Thus, in this song, aspects of masculinity are satirized as the singer's final position is converted to one that is traditionally feminine, much to his apparent surprise.

Rose stalks Davey in "Hermaphrodite"
(Lynch 2000).
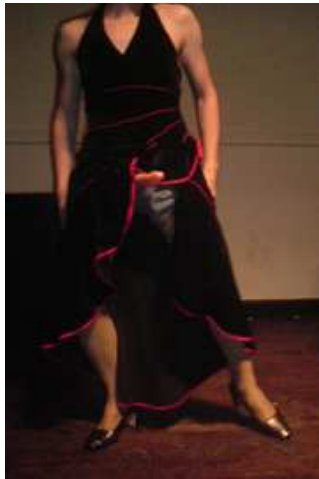
Rose revealing "Hermaphrodite's" member

Davey and Rose's characters consummate the relationship

Such performances enable drag to be seen in a light-hearted, if roundly satirical manner. While this is the bread and butter of drag performance, it is not believed that the desire to get the biggest laugh is the whole basis on which the respondents' material is chosen. The interviews illustrated that when questioned further on what their performances aimed to achieve, each of the performers spoke in some way of personal development and of the way they felt they were perceived by mainstream society. This personal development appears also to be divided into two categories; that which is largely playful, and that which is intended to have impact on the performers themselves.

Evidence gathered during this study suggests that the performance of gender enables the performers to interrogate notions of the creation of gender identity, and it is interesting to note that all of the respondents at @D2 who were questioned on their sex and gender perception considered their core gender identity and sexual orientation to be essentialist (if fluid), while their gender representation was thought to be based on nurture, and, thus, could be manually altered to concur with the essential aspects (Maddison 2006b). Their

method of achieving this was through the same manner as the *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) balls, the use of exercises that focus on the interrelationship between their own identity, and their performance personae. Both venues represent what Stephen King calls a "cultural echo chamber" conceptualising the social construction of identity (1991 72).[43] Like Livingston's (1990) respondents, the performers at @D2 do not perform their drag presentation in the same ways that they perform in the outside world, regardless of how closely tied their performances are to their own perspectives or developmental aims. It is important to note King's use of the term "echo chamber" (1991 72) to describe the place's function. An echo reaches its destination after a delay and can be distorted by its environment. It is a place where the performers ascertain their response and, thus, relationship to the images in order to determine their mode of interaction, rather than it being a place demanding a direct, or gut, response.

This "echo chamber" (Ibid) can firstly be utilised as a method of gender play. Drag's ability to utilise diverse cultural references due to its declassification as particularly LGBTQ entertainment has enabled its utilisation of a wider variety of identities that critique notions of what is possible within society. It is particularly true in this case as Rose stated that he conceptualises sex-role behaviour as the direct product of nurture, being "just how you're brought up" (2006) and, thus, evidently used the performance to experiment with different types. This enables a further queering of the notion of queer itself, thus presenting a type of 'omniqueer' that can emerge through play with a variety of sexual relationship themes. In the Aladdin theme, "A Whole New World" (using the original wording, Menken and Rice 1992), Rose played the title role in the section depicting the princess' seduction, played by Maddison. Accepted notions of masculinity were examined through the 'realness' of the

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[43] A term borrowed from Stephen King describing the same phenomenon, but in relation to the horror genre (King 1991).

sexual roles presented. In a similar manner to the concept as utilised by the *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) drag balls, 'realness' is achieved in this performance through a role-play scenario. The performers seek to embody the genders specified through actions pertaining to the sexing of the body in a manner mirroring Butler's concept of "girling", and as a result, emulate the mental states (Butler 1993 7).

After a period of attempted verbal seduction, Rose removes his clothes to reveal a masculine, gymnasium-toned body, but with the addition of a pair of knee-length comic boxer shorts (hiding the body and drawing attention away from the genitals), to which was attached a foot-long fabric penis. Rose drew attention to these articles by placing his arms towards the back of his body, indicating that in order for him to be (real)ised as male, the penis should be used in a sexual relationship with a notional female, a style and suggestion evidently recognised by the audience. The princess is (real)ised through an understated performance of demure gesticulation. Eventually, after Rose instigates mimed rear entry, she is thrown to the floor and intercourse is mimed with 'her' in the missionary position, thus also 'erecting' the penis, which hangs to the floor.[44] The performance thus posited the notion that 'maleing' via sexual intercourse can be achieved through the image of a female, rather than the female body itself.

However, it goes further than this. The moment the princess hits the floor and is mounted by the prince, there is a moment of what Butler calls "degrounding" in which the audience becomes fearful of the representation (2004 39). This is a result of the femininity implied in

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[44] This performance could have been construed to suggest the actual subordination of females was considered a necessary part of the 'girling' process, so closely did the speed of the seduction suggest rape. It is, however, unlikely that the regular audience would have understood it as such, as this would have been a dramatic change of ethos for the company.

both performers. Masculinity is indicated as a construct though Rose's drag make-up and the use of what amounts to a dildo, which also suggests the connotations of a male engaging in lesbian behaviour. The multiple interpretations of such a scene effectively challenge the categories of 'gay', 'straight', 'masculine', 'feminine', 'male' and 'female' and, thus, indicate how: "the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable" (Butler 2004 216).[45]

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[45] It is interesting to note that when describing a girl who was disruptive during performances, both respondents refer to her gender identity as a method of showing her actions to be unreasonable. Firstly, Rose (2006) questions the validity of her as a "cool", non-responsive and, thus, butch lesbian who gets a friend to threaten him as she cannot 'realise' the identity. After explaining the incident further, Davey supports Rose by stating the girl may not even be a lesbian. To invalidate her behaviour, they question her gender identity in order to remove her significance and right to remain a part of the community.

Rose and Maddison parody "A Whole New World." Rose's "Aladdin" invites Maddison's "Princess" to make him a man (left); the relationship about to be consummated (below).

While Rose no doubt benefitted from his sheer professional enjoyment of this gender play, he clearly did not seek to use his performance as a template for further behaviour outside drag. The genre can, however, offer the performers the chance to actively develop their personal conceptualisation of gender. As with categories in which the performers 'walked' in *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), the character types used by @D2's performers are revealed through detailed costumes and an attempt to embody a mindset. The company's acceptance of this is judged to be a demonstration that the persona presented is "real", which is interpreted by the participants as being the performer's ease with something resembling their essential nature (Davey 2006g). The participants are, thus, enabled to embody stereotypes of their fantasies, although the extent to which this takes place varies dependant on the character and its purpose. For example, in some cases, this embodiment is largely on the level of play, as would appear to be the case with Davey during

"Hermaphrodite" (Lynch 2000), literally portraying the other persona for the sheer experience of understanding another mindset.

Alternatively, the performances can be a very literal interpretation of "realness", in which the performers develop aspects of the characters they play with a view to potentially developing those characteristics of behaviour for themselves. In *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), this behaviour could be seen in the ball walkers in the "school girl" category. They appear to be aged in their twenties or older, which suggests they do not intend to actually become school girls, but aim to explore different facets of their personality via what equates to a Stanislavskian "Magic If" scenario (Benedetti 2008 and Merlin 2007). Their performance succeeds in part as "performances with almost no skills [can be] powerful performances because they came out of authentic feelings" (Zimmer quoted in Carlson 1998 148), in this case, the performers' desire to personally merge with the concept. This impulse was also exhibited by Davey in her primary role as Mingeeta Lickalotopus, a lesbian dominatrix whose back story, as with those of the other characters, is her own development and does not reflect the comments that are made by other cast members as part of the show (Davey 2006n). In the most obvious instance, as Davey states, Mingeeta affords her some of the confidence that she would like to have in her own actions and expressions (Ibid).[46]

That the performances appear to be so closely tied to be performers' aims for their own personalities, while at the same time being a somewhat fantastical variant, demands further exploration. This necessitates a definition of what constitutes 'drag' and how, or if, it must

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[46] A statement echoed by Maddison's: "I think your drag persona is basically everything that you are and everything that you don't have the confidence to be as your own self day-to-day" (Maddison 2006c).

be differentiated from acting, particularly when considering its relationship to the development of the performers' identities. Both drag and acting involve affecting certain characteristics or personalities. Both types also utilise concepts of performance that can be seen as the demonstration of ability to accomplish an activity to an agreed level of competence. In the Harlem drag balls featured on *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) and at @D2, the success of the performance is considered to be the level of "realness" attained by the performer. This "realness" has some similarities with traditional acting, as it may involve the conveyance of feeling and possibly the display of appropriate skills, such as dance. The differentiation between the two, however, lies in the reason for, and aims of, the performance. Unlike in traditional acting, where the character is typically discarded following the performance, the aim of "realness" in the drag balls is to enable the performer to experience and potentially incorporate the role into their own personality and circumstances, should this be their wish. It is shown by Harlem Balls' compeer Junior LaBeija's comment: "What ever you want to be, you be" (Livingston 1990), which is mirrored exactly by Davey's comment drag can represent "a belief that [you] can be that person" (2006d).

However, Mingeeta's development has led to experimentation with other aspects of identity, particularly as Davey plays some of these other characters as though from Mingeeta's perspective. To Davey, the character of Mingeeta has come to signify not only sexual confidence necessary in her supposed role as a dominatrix, but also a liberating confidence that encourages exploration and divergent outcomes rather than simply control. These characters are necessary for the performers to be able to interrogate those notions of gender: The New Penny's Anna Glypta modelled her drag persona on the sometimes

grotesque drag performer Divine, but she also states that the Anna persona allows her to "play out a lot of [her] female side" (Rayne 2007c). This suggests that performing in drag enables the experience of feeling female in a micro-culture where the social differences between the sexes are not considered important. It is a concept recalling T.S. Eliot's objective correlative as the performer uses hyperbolic, dramatic presentation to attempt to suggest a concentration of the experiences that would have led to the character as seen if they had matured in the other gender (1997).[47]

Furthermore, it enables Davey's exploration of other personas, such as that of a drag king, without as much concern that her performance will be accepted. It is this enquiring spirit that encourages such a range of other personas, yet one that allows the position of the receptor of King's "cultural echo" (1991 72), so to speak, to remain unchanged in the long term, should they so choose, as Pepper LaBeiga has commented (Livingston 1990). However, if we are to consider Davey's performance of the stereotype of the butch lesbian or drag king as the norm, Butler's comments are an essential critique:

> [T]he citing of the dominant norm does not […] displace the norm; rather, it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects. (Butler 1993 133)

Davey's appropriation of the drag king, or butch lesbian role may not guarantee her acceptance as having that range within her identity. It follows that in this space of gender experimentation, there may be occasions when the gender identity presented is either

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[47] This may be the case in terms of both transsexuality, through the comments of Anna Glypta, and in terms of an alternate gender identity, as in the case of Davey, as someone who at first had heterosexual relationships. Glypta has stated that in drag, she acts out her female role and is often referred to as Anna, although at other times also states that the comic exaggeration of drag ensures it is not merely temporary transsexuality (Rayne 2006c).

misinterpreted or does not suit the performer and, thus, falls flat, and can lead to Butler's "painful [reiteration]" (Ibid) on the performer's awareness. This may be considered a failure of the both the gender representation and, thus, the performance, although both may remain visually entertaining.

This is a situation in which, as Richard Ekins and David King have commented:

> The recent emphasis upon the transgression of gender boundaries and on performance rather than identity marks a return to experience and behaviour. In such behaviour the experiences and behaviours [of cross-dressers] are made sense of in terms of the deconstructions of postmodernist cultural theory rather than from the standpoint of the experiences of cross-dressers and sex-changers themselves. In consequence, these writings have yet to make a substantial impact on the subjective experience of gender blending. (1996 5)

Such gendering 'failures' are a primary example of an identity being made sense of via theory rather than from the perspective of the cross-dressers themselves. They are rarely discussed in such terms as the topic is so highly personal, and because it is often in the critical interest to continually perceive such outcomes as unexpected developments rather than the inability to produce the desired effect. They are, however, an inherent part of much drag performance, even on the most basically comic of levels, as Anna Glypta says: "The audience know that they can laugh with and AT the performer, it goes some way towards equalising the balance of power between the performer and audience" (Rayne 2006c). While the drag queen may earn the audience's laughter through their comic talent, this may also be prompted by mistakes that simply cause them to look temporarily ridiculous.

This failure can also occur on other grounds, the first being that the audience misunderstands the gender that the performance is intended to demonstrate. The precision

of understanding is essential if the identity is to continue to remain understandable within the queered context. As previously stated, @D2 admits heterosexuals, and thus it is possible that not all of the social identities (and their 'queerings') will be recognised. As Baker comments, this can alter the perception of the performance, effectively altering its political message (1994). Context is all-important. This can be seen through The Duckie Collective's production of *C'est Barbican*! Individual artists performed in return for "Duckie Dollar" tokens, the idea being: "…a joke at the expense of corporate entertainment and sex entertainment" ("C'est Barbican: Duckie Among the Luvvies" in *The Independent*, 21st December 2003). This satirical element impacted on performances such as "Live Sex Change", which ostensibly critiqued notions of personal identity, refuting sympathetic readings. However, the company's choice of venue was the mainstream Barbican theatre, not the LGBTQ site, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, and this changed how their acts were perceived. They were placed in the position of the outsider, that which is watched, yet is not touched. *C'est Barbican!* was popular as hen night and Christmas entertainment, suggesting it was "romanticising and/or appropriating the standpoints of the subjugated, of building new holism out of "summing and subsuming parts"" (Walker quoting Haraway 1993 871). The show became a replica of its own replication, but one in which "the point of departure", to use Butler's terminology (1997b), was radically changed due to a non-LGBTQ commercial audience seeking corporate entertainment (North 2003). Thus, the venue does not constitute a "domain of *speakability*" as the audience refuted the status of the performers as "*subject*" (Butler 1997b 133). These audiences, as with those at @D2, effectively censor the production, but in the case of *C'est Barbican!*, the censoring completely transfigured the implications of the personal performative. The performance may well have brought a new audience to 'identity' theatre, but they were not 'in on the joke', and, thus, the original intent failed.

However, even in situations where the performative context is understood, it may be rejected by the audience, fellow performers or by the artist themselves. This may be because the portrayal is unconfident, unbelievable, or does not match their own goals, particularly if these rely on physical appearance rather than their own attitude, as Davey has suggested can be the case (2006g). More likely is another case posited by Davey, that the participants can perform 'realness' within the confines of the venue, but are unable to "talk the talk" outside of this incubatory setting (Ibid). The performance may not receive the desired response, or may constitute development considered to be untrue to the performers' interests.

This failure is not, however, a solely negative part of the gender development process. While the concept of realness allows the performers to explore the possibilities of the role without necessary commitment, uncritical repetition would not facilitate development. In this regard, Phelan's comments in relation to the *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) balls are relevant:

> Masochism is an integral part of the spectacle; pain is never too far from the parade of costume and Protean self-invention demanded by the discriminating spectators/performers who watch the show – spectators who no matter how critical are ever so much "safer" than the spectators on the street. (1993 162)

Paris is Burning (Livingston 1990) provides a framework demonstrating the effects of rejection on the performer and gender identity presented. It is highly reminiscent of the audition process associated with reality television talent shows, wherein the audience and judges promote or negate both the performance and personality of the performer. Phelan's

reflection ignores a social function of masochism, the willingness to receive pain as an indicator of the acceptance of culturally stipulated personal failings. In contexts where performances remain within the confines of the *Paris is Burning* (Ibid) hall, this pain serves no social purpose. Phelan is, however, correct with the qualifier that the chosen categories are appropriable. It is one thing to appear confident, yet quite another to utilise that confidence to successfully enact such behaviour outside of the event. A disjuncture occurs when success in the drag balls is understood as equal to the ability to demonstrate the skill fully in mainstream society, as Phelan comments:

> [T]he balls are serious rehearsals for a much tougher walk – down the "mean streets" of New York City. The balls are opportunities to use theatre to imitate the theatricality of everyday life – a life which includes show girls, bangee boys, and business executives. (1993 161)

As the performances are placed for examination, the "pain" (Phelan 1993 162) of attempted representation acts in the same way the gender norms do, reflecting an impossibly idealised level of attainment against which one can measure themselves and 'improve' through comparison endlessly. The point here, as post-drag performance and the representation of 'realness' demonstrates, is that most of these social categories are appropriable and the theatricality of difference is in fact what can 'realise' them. Moreover, mythologies of these roles are already available, should the confidence required to utilise them be developed in this performative context.

Controversial though it may be, this performative masochism and continuous gender development has far wider implications both for the @D2 performers and for their community. The framework for this reason can be ascertained through comparison again to

Paris is Burning (Livingston 1990). Several of Livingston's performers stated that the aim of 'realness' is to hide "the fact that you're gay" by assuming an identity unassociated with homosexuality (Livingston 1990). Therefore, 'realness' is equally about hiding something as it is about development. The comparison, however, alters in terms of @D2, which exists in a cultural climate far more accepting of non-heterosexuality. Interviews did, nevertheless, reveal that these respondents wanted to hide something - any approximation to what they considered to be negative homosexual stereotypes.

Rose (2006) considered camp, as the performance of homosexuality, to be a state that one 'grows out of' with maturity, with its signifiers being an affected, high-pitched voice (often dropped in non-LGBTQ environments), and items of clothing such as 'belly tops' – short, tight t-shirts that reveal the torso - which can be discarded. The four members of the six-strong company who were interviewed reiterated this view, suggesting an issue of community censorship impacting on the notion of what it is to be homosexual, to appear homosexual, and what that entails. This affects the very notion of queering, particularly as the respondents asserted that these often highly flamboyant verbal and visual signifiers are particularly affiliated to younger people, and are emblematic of a "Pridey" stage in which an individual first chooses to publicly display their sexuality. Currently, this manifests through males wearing the stereotypical attire detailed above to indicate their willingness to be identified by other homosexual males as sexually available. The high-pitched voice and other general flamboyance are perceived as mimicry of feminine behaviour, both of which may be seen to encourage the approach of a potential partner. Indeed, Davey half-jokingly commented that her past co-performers acted on occasion like "13 year-old girls" (2006) an interesting assertion as the implication of puberty and the subsequent awareness of

sexuality at that age does recall the acceptance of sexual awareness for LGBTQ men during the process of 'coming out.'[48]

However, whilst some within the community continue to manifest variants of these behaviours, this stage is nevertheless seen by Rose (2006) as something to be matured through and left behind; a transient stage of affirmation. He and the other respondents essentially implied that to be (real)ised as a matured, and fully-fledged homosexual man is to actively refute or erase the constructed signs of homosexual identity, a thematic spectre also inherent in *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), where Corey states that to be real is to "erase all the mistakes, all the giveaways to make the illusion [of being heterosexual] perfect" (Livingston 1990). The 'mistake' in Rose's view could be seen as "camp" itself, which he suggested was only permissible in a context of entertainment, as was shown when he assumed a high-pitched voice and flamboyant gesticulation at Davey's suggestion that he could himself be perceived as camp at times, while all present dissolved into gales of laughter (Rose 2006).[49] This of course necessitates the definition of what 'camp' signifies to the respondents. When asked to suggest an explanation for the term, Rose offered the phrase "as camp as Christmas" (Ibid). When asked to elucidate, Davey answered: "It's like going over the top, you know like you walk past somebody's house and it's like Christmas has landed there and it's like everything's exploded on touch-down" (Ibid).

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[48] It is interesting that Hallam (2006) was the one respondent to jokily offer himself as an example of camp. Although he did not state when he came out, he had donned drag as his coming-of-age rite-of-passage on his eighteenth birthday only three months prior to the interview. Females also have a version of 'coming out' clothes. In particular, those who identify according to the butch stereotype often wear clothes that disguise the feminine body or make it appear androgynous The author's personal preference was suit jackets.

[49] This was in response to a semi-structured interview question in which he was asked to define what 'camp' meant to him. He continued acting in this 'high camp' fashion while discussing the subject, evidently aiming (and succeeding) in entertaining and amusing the party. He assumed his usual demeanour when addressing the next subject.

This suggests they see camp as pure, yet multi-dimensional flamboyance, but one which, by attempting to express a multifaceted concept, cannot hold its own margins and fragments, becoming a mosaic that obscures and fragments the original intent. For example, Maddison comments that "bad camp" aims to be "[spiteful]" and "[venomous]" (Maddison 2006b) – what Hallam (2006) terms as being "an evil bitch", while all appear to concur that "good" camp is that which points out foibles, but in a manner that is done with "grace and humour" through satire (Maddison 2006b).[50] However, as many who have been to drag shows have noted, the distinction between these two is a grey area indeed, and as Davey (2006n) comments, can often appear malicious when directed at an audience member – destructive without the additional constructive implications. Thus, in this sense, camp represents only a fractured version of homosexual identity, its most flamboyant stages. Indeed, Rose (2006) has asserted that there are two types of camp, the flamboyant type recalling Christmas, and what he refers to as "queenie" camp, which he defines as being "blatantly nasty to people" and behaving "like a drag queen". He states that this results from individuals retaining alter-egos used for the LGBTQ entertainment scene, and, thus, considers the performance of their sexuality to take precedence over the sum total of their identity, thus obscuring themselves, or putting on an act. This confirms, therefore, that for the performers to appear 'real' as gay men, the fragmentations of camp must be refuted entirely.

Similarly, comment was made concerning perceptions of lesbianism. As the second chapter of this thesis will show, these stereotypes clearly affected Davey, whose identity had been questioned as a result of some lesbian customers' perception of her deviation from supposed norms. Indeed, during interviews, Rose (2006) disparagingly commented on

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[50] Harry Hallam, also known as Holly Prick, is eighteen years old. He had been performing in drag for three months after cross-dressing as a rite-of-passage on his eighteenth birthday, when he was complimented on his appearance and invited to join the troupe by CherAround.

clients with whom he had had difficulties, who he perceived as being "cool", which, in this context, equated as meaning arrogant and rude. This presentation could be seen to prevent Davey from achieving her aim of being perceived as a lesbian untroubled by stereotypes by asserting an image that she neither could, nor wanted to inhabit, so different was it to her natural character, as she comments:

> Women who have been gay all their lives, it's almost like they are more respected than people like myself. And I've had this with the whole being quite girly thing. I have had women tell me that I cannot possible be gay – I've had quite a lot of abuse in a way when I've worked in the pub because they're saying, "well you're just pretending" and stuff like that because I haven't shaved my hair off [and I don't go around] wearing dungarees. I know these are stereotypes but some stereotypes are true. (Davey 2006h)

Her sexuality is initially doubted on the basis of her appearance, but the performances challenge this scenario in two ways.

The first, and most obvious way is through attack of those primarily associated with perpetuating the negative stereotype, which is enacted through the satire found in all of the performances, and in the banter with which the performers engage the audience. Davey has stated that she feels drag's purpose is to highlight these "foibles" (2006c) and thus equalise the audience with the performers themselves, a sentiment manifest in Rose's (2006) comment on rudeness, a device highlighting and questioning social incongruence. It is the very focus of which to critique notions of difference based on individual behaviour choices, and, thus, question their acceptability, as can be seen via Rose's alluded comparison between homophobia and his perception of domestic violence.

> It's because you're not the same as them, you're this awful, horrible, abomination of humanity […] It's like, 'I'm not on the social, I don't have three screaming kids that I hit all the time, so why am I worse than you? (Ibid)

Rose compares his activities to those of someone who he considers would be homophobic and, thus, potentially discriminate against him. Not only does he identify what he considers to be their foibles – socially accepted standards of unacceptable behaviour such as violence, he illustrates how he feels he contributes to society by acting in the opposite way to them, by refraining from violence and supporting himself financially, and, thus, contributing to his community. Using these socially accepted standards of good citizenship, he posits it is they, rather than he, who are the abomination.

However, their response is not merely 'an attack as defence' strategy. As this thesis will show with regards to much drag performance, it has a regenerative aspect. The respondents' recognition of the stereotypes they define as negative and the suggestion that homophobia is unfounded if their behaviour is responsible becomes the site of departure for a process of transition through LGBTQ identity. This assertion questions the nature of the transition and the identification of its stages. As Butler suggests, the use of the possibilities of the body is the site of its ontological knowledge and, thus, a site of departure (Butler 2004). To announce oneself as LGBTQ is still to place oneself in a cultural discourse as 'other'. It indicates inclusion within a minority who have faced oppression on the basis of sexuality, and implicitly on the basis of gender identity through same-sex desire (Butler 1993). As this minority has challenged its oppression, part of the experience of being LGBTQ is to be culturally compelled to explain one's identity, particularly for performers

in an environment where a significant proportion of the audience do not share their sexual perceptions.[51]

To acknowledge this by using performance to override negative stereotypes in a predominantly LGBTQ environment is a form of censorship, on which Butler has commented:

> …no text can remain a text, that is, remain readable, without first being subjected to some kind of censorship. This view presupposes that censorship precedes the text in question, and that for a text to become readable, it must be produced through a process of selection that rules out certain possibilities, and realises others. (1997b 128)

In the case of @D2's performers, the "text" is the overt display of stereotyped LGBTQ identities (Ibid). The censorship is of the 'negative' camp male identity, and the stereotypical butch lesbian presentation. By refusing to exact the expected performativity of the individual, a 'realised' version of the identity, encompassing the sexuality as well as the individual's personality, is allowed to emerge. However, in censoring the identity, via "rules that govern intelligibility" (Ibid), this intelligibility is reformulated. This asserts the point of departure from the original identity that, as a result of its existence outside of the original boundary of the permissible, has not been theorised in this context and is therefore theoretically open to use. Both are a process along a continuum, rather than opposites, as Butler asserts, although she is correct in stating:

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[51] In particular, equality and diversity legislation supports agencies such as Stonewall (npg.) to act as advocates of LGBTQ identity and rights.

> If censoring a text is always in some sense incomplete, that may be partly because the text in question takes on new life as part of the very discourse produced by the mechanism of censorship. (Butler 1997b 130)

It is this new life that redefines the concept of censorship in this environment. It does not seek to eliminate previous conceptualisations of LGBTQ identity, for this is often incorporated into its satirical element, yet it produces other images that suggest other avenues that have not yet been censored as they are not fully conceptualised as they are constantly evolving.

For those that do then practice these previously censored aspects of identity, the skill to display 'realness' develops until it becomes a skill or mindset that the performer can embody in the rest of their life outside of the balls, effectively developing into the person they want to become. In this context, Goldsby's question of when "appropriation" becomes "co-optation", or at least attempted co-optation, is answered (1993 112). In *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), Octavia St Laurent provides a model for this. Her performances in the "fem realness" category of the balls evolve into her attempts to become a fashion model in the 'outer' world, where she utilises socially accepted routes to embody her dream through learning about deportment and 'passing', to be accepted as a birth female at modelling exhibitions. She acts as a "destabilisation that is denaturalising and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate" (Butler 1993 128).[52]

Davey operates in a similar fashion. By appropriating aspects of stereotypical lesbian attributes to increase interest in her performances - notably eroticism and dominance, she is

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[52] It is sadly ironic that Octavia's participation in the documentary acts as her own exposure, ensuring that she may only ever be 'real' in the context of that very destabilisation, which is not the context she desires.

also enabled to begin to reformulate what being a lesbian entails within LGBTQ society as a result of her performances. Performances that directly reference the enjoyment of her sexuality, such as a routine choreographed to "I Touch Myself" (Amphlett et als 1990) demonstrate a willingness to be seen as the desiring partner, rather than being purely the receptacle of the audience's fantasies.

In the same manner as the respondents in *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), this enables her to decide upon the type of relationships she wishes to form within the community, as a result of her confidence in the mixture of dominance and sexuality. As Butler posits, social norms are a symbolic ideal, yet due to this symbolic nature, "materialisation is never quite complete", allowing the reiteration that accompanies attempting to achieve these ideals to rematerialise them (1993 2). Although Butler's comment primarily concerns the attribution of sex to an individual, it is nevertheless a concept that can be used to encompass any attempt to embody a behaviour or norm. Their repetition of the reiterated ideal enables the participants to alter their perception of it as 'other' to themselves and, thus, incorporate it or its attributes into their personality, effectively giving it emancipatory potential (Butler 1993). Davey's repetition of lesbian imagery eventually led to her receiving increasing acceptance within the community, not to mention sexual advances, in the same manner as the *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) "bangee" boy and girl contestants could achieve their ideal to "hang out with the roughest and the toughest" (Livingston 1990).[53] This is particularly the case if the desired gender performance can be maintained, as Corey comments: "Realness is to be able to blend […] The idea of realness is to look as much as

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[53] This particular category refutes bell hooks' claim that the balls can never be subversive. It demonstrates that not all of the performance categories conform to an idealisation of "[white] ruling-class women" (hooks 1992 148).

possible as your straight counterpart" (Ibid). Davey can look like 'a lesbian' as she has broadened the conceptualisation of her counterpart.

Davey as her primary drag character, lesbian dominatrix Mingeeta Lickolotopus.

To succeed as their fantasised personae, the performers must 'pass' outside of performance contexts in order to gain acceptance and be reacted to in the desired manner. The concept is summed up in Corey's statement: "If I had the opportunity I would be [an executive] because I can look like one […] Your peers are telling you [that] you look like an executive" (Livingston 1990). Their preparation for this role involves a conscious mimicking of norms enabling them to display 'realness' to their peers. They are automatically read by the audience who know by virtue of their participation that they are not, or do not feel that they fully embody, the persona they present whilst performing. They must defy being 'read' whilst encouraging it in order to develop beyond it, as Corey states: "If you can pass the untrained eye, or even the trained eye, and not give away the fact that you're gay, that's when it's real" (Livingston 1990). However, this method of becoming their fantasy can fail as they project the concept they intend to convey, but which is itself based on their perception of a concept they have not experienced; their understanding is

based on image alone, and particularly images that glamourise the subject to promote it as an ideal, rather than depicting it holistically. It makes them self-consciously a replica of a stereotype, and as a result, they cannot truly integrate the persona.

However, this is where the truly developmental process of drag gender development begins: where the performers can begin to have faith in their characters enough to allow them to become the people they want to be.

> Fantasy is not simply a cognitive exercise, an internal film that we project inside the interior theatre of the mind. Fantasy structures relationality, and it comes into play in the stylisation of embodiment itself. Bodies are not inhabited as spatial givens. They are, in their spatiality, also underway in time: aging, altering shape, altering signification – depending on their interactions – and the web of the visual, discursive, and tactile relations that become part of their historicity, their constitutive past, present, and future. (Butler 2004 217)

Reiterating this other image creates their own new conceptualisation of their homosexuality. While not conforming to traditional models of LGBTQ behaviour, it ironically becomes a truer epitome of the queer. It becomes a minority identity within an already minority community as it is both further queered in the imagination of the performance, and at the same time is demonstrated as a possible reality, recalling Jonathan Van Meter's argument for the fantastical quality of transformable personal identities (Van Meter 1996), and as Butler comments:

> …this is a performance that works, that affects realness, to the extent that it *cannot* be read. For "reading" means taking someone down, exposing what fails to work at the level of appearance, insulting or deriding someone. For a performance to work, then, means that a reading is no longer possible, or that a reading, an interpretation, appears to be a kind of transparent seeing, where

what appears and what it means coincide. On the contrary, when what appears and how it is "read" diverge, the artifice splits off from its appropriation. But the impossibility of reading means that the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable. (1993 129)

As a result, the performance is able to defy the concept of realness itself. These performers' performances become a representation of their journeys, as well as the audience's journey of witnessing their actions. They are, thus, enabled to define the new queer. The characters the @D2 performers play become less than the sum of their parts, as the performers move beyond the boundaries they had themselves originally invented to develop their personal goals. The performance space enables performers such as Rose and Maddison to gain faith in their own perspectives through the respect their actions garner, thus, realising what contribution the ideas that have been facilitated by their sexuality have given them. Rose's character becomes insightful rather than primarily detrimental, Maddison's becomes someone to whom the audience can relate on personal, rather than simply stereotypical, terms, and Davey gradually gains the confidence to project different traits as a representation of her gender identity. Both when portraying Mingeeta and utilising the costume as herself, she directly reverses her concerns over acceptance by gaining confidence through "knowing that she looks good" and that her community will not only accept, but enjoy seeing her do so (Davey 2006m). As Maddison has commented:

…you befriend people and people will kind of come and talk to you and everything – people aspire to be kind of like you. Not necessarily in what you do, but they see a confidence thing – they kind of er – a figure that's kind of on the gay scene. (Maddison 2006c)

These outcomes are not necessarily permutations of identity – after a while, the addition of new monikers to the LGBTQ cannon can become vacuous and non-descriptive as each may

define one individual who is themselves part of a similar community. As Davey has commented:

> I think there are intrinsic things with gender which probably change that are there from Day 1. I think that what changes is how we view them, how we interpret the feelings we have rather than the gender issues or gender traits changing. (Davey 2006g)

They are, thus, encouraged to continue to act out their developed gender in the real world. While drag performance's dual heritage of resistance and entertainment have brought with them a crisis of confidence as to the purpose of the form itself, it has enabled performers to focus on the perception of the community in the mainstream, and in turn how they feel they are treated in the light of these stereotypes. By way of interrogating what they consider to be negative imagery, they can use the performance space to modify their performative sex and gender identity. In doing so they are able to develop their own perceptions and expand the conceptualisation of LGBTQ identity whilst also contributing to how their community self-perceives.

For this is surely the challenge they, as performers, accept - to act as a cultural mirror for their audience and demonstrate how to utilise and understand a fragmented identity – but one that, due to its potency as a tool for personal change, can be given an overt and intentional function within their society. This will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: The Great Fool

Individual identities can be socially constructed, as demonstrated in the opening chapter of this thesis. This chapter's hypothesis is that LGBTQ people are socially placed to act as educators as their gender and sexual identities highlight the incongruities inherent in cultural systems. Alluding to a variety of LGBTQ critics and commentators from different backgrounds (such as Kate Bornstein 1994, Judith Butler 1993, Karla Jay and Allan Young 1992), this chapter will argue that each LGBTQ individual's theoretical difference from the social norm can provide them with an alternative perspective that enables them to deconstruct systems of behaviour that are presented as necessary to the continuation of society. They are, in turn, enabled to educate their community in a manner akin to that of the shaman. This chapter will elucidate the historical precedence of the role, and its utilisation of public performance with reference to the work of Laurence Senelick (2000) and other anthropological sources. Historical texts will then be used to illustrate how the performative aspects of spiritual gender-crossing have actively instigated socio-political events. Finally, it will refer to the work of Judith Butler (1993) to demonstrate how the social power of the LGBTQ shaman derives directly from their ability to appreciate non-conformist social perspectives, rather than from a particular theory or socially prescribed knowledge standard, to prove that this ability is a political tool in its own right.

If an individual does not solely desire the 'opposite' sex, or feels uncomfortable with their birth physiology, and therefore gender role, they are immediately placed at odds with social expectation, whether or not they act on their desires (Jay and Young 1992, and Whisman 1996), as Patrick Higgins' quotation of Edmund White illustrates:

> …we could speak of 'gay science', that obligatory existentialism forced on people who must invent themselves … One discovers one is gay one must choose everything, from how to walk, dress and talk to where to live, with whom and one what terms (in Higgins 1993 223)

The situation can lead to a re-evaluation of the way in which one must interact with society and indeed what legacy they may leave after death, as the continuation of their genetic line would be at least be placed in doubt. This chapter will now proceed to demonstrate how the LGBTQ community have attempted to come to terms with this psychical, social and physical exclusion that can occur when one's sexuality or gender is at odds with the expectations of the sex-role system.

It is difficult to identify the denotations, let alone the connotations, of homosexual existence. It is nevertheless attempted by Queer Theory in order to gain understanding of what it actually means to be 'queer', and what the social implications of this are. This is particularly pertinent considering the term has historically been used as an insult, with its primary definition being: "Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character. Also, of questionable character, suspicious, dubious. *queer fellow*, an eccentric person" (*OED Online*, accessed 10th July 2006). Indeed, the cultural association between non-compliance with heterosexuality and the term 'queer' is so ingrained that the term's secondary definition consists of a direct reference to the behavior: "Of a person (usually a man): homosexual. Also in phrase. *as queer as a coot* […] Hence, of things: pertaining to homosexuals or homosexuality" (Ibid).

The Queer Theory movement has attempted to utilise the term to deflect its power. That is, by agreeing to ownership of its connotations, they have used it to define the community as

a group of people proud of their similar characteristics (Butler 1993). Nevertheless, the term evokes within the mainstream community, and invokes within the LGBTQ community, a sense that the word still retains its derogatory social connotations:

> The term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity. The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names, or, rather the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpolation […] The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time. In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts 'queer!' (Butler 1993 226)

However, this notion of performativity implicitly raises within itself other connotations that are additional to Butler's assertion. To perform the "shaming" (Ibid) of a person requires the shamed person to 'perform' the recognition that they have been shamed (for example by blushing), in order for the term to become representative by indicating its subject. However, this is not enough to ensure the full formation of interpellations that constitute the performance – the agent of the production of the "shaming" (Ibid) must also be visible. In order for the shaming to remain in the domain of LGBTQ identities, as connoted by the term "queer" (Ibid) and not migrate to the colloquial usage, 'odd', it is essential that the person who performs the shaming gesture, the 'shamer', does so to an appropriate person, so that they can recognise that they have been 'correctly' identified. However, the shaming technique requires a paradox from the person who is shamed. Shame itself is an emotional reaction based on the recognition that one is behaving in what one considers an inappropriate or unfortunate manner. The shamed person feels a level of remorse or embarrassment that suggests to both the shamed person and the shamer that their behaviour should be changed, regardless of whether or not they are able or willing to do so.

However, it must also be noted that the very act of shaming using the term 'queer', rather than language to the effect of 'Oi, you scoundrel!' *compels* the further performance of the shamed person by naming their supposed failing, yet not actually demanding it is stopped, or indeed stopping it. The naming/accusation sets out an ideological boundary of the legitimacy of the shaming activity, rather than denying its existence by refusing to name its content. If the shamed person accepts the interpellation and feels they could be 'queer' in a particular fashion, they are further 'queered' in their own psyches. And, of course, if they are, and have been, further queered, it stands to reason that they may seek to demonstrate, or at least find out, what the performance they have been impelled to do entails. In the words of Quentin Crisp: "I am someone who had been forced by life to be self-conscious and has now tried to make that self-consciousness into a way of life" (quoted in Carlson 1998 155).

These inferences have contributed to what may be construed as searching for heroes – that is, the research of others who have themselves lived in a way not governed by the sex-role system. The aim of this is presumably to find that it is possible to survive, physically and socially, having 'opted-out' (Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey 1991). As communal beings, we also seek to learn from these heroes what our social role may be.

However, where lists of such heroes have been compiled, it can be seen that the people mentioned often have highly desirable personal attributes. These often take the form of intellectual talent, normally that which is still held in great esteem by the general public. In short, these heroes have left a legacy by contributing to society through their endeavours,

thus ensuring the survival of their memory.[54] The desire to leave a legacy, after all, is something generic to all humans, as beings aware of the passage of time, and more importantly, as a group capable of recognising individuals on the basis of thought process and personality types, rather than simply physiological issues concerned with the ability to procreate. We are as much concerned with intellectual legacy and the need to understand our society, as we are to desire to continue it, as can be seen from the inclusion of literary figures in the *Great Britons* television series (BBC 2002).

The common denominator in many of the diverse titles in the bibliography for this thesis is the need to understand what is to be homosexual or have a 'queer sensibility', in order to be able to discern one's position within the current cultural climate (Freeman 2004). The cultural imperative of the search for modern heroes is made explicit in the "Acknowledgements" section of *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation:*

> At this point, most anthologies usually include a long list of contributing authors, giving their degrees, titles, affiliations, and track records. We have decided to eliminate this formality because we would like each article to be judged independently on its content – whether it was written by a fourth-grade dropout or a Ph.D. (Jay and Young 1992 lxiii)

In other words, this represents a modern realisation that experience of sex and gender non-normative behaviour or ideation is in itself a pre-requisite for the modern LGBTQ hero. Kate Bornstein has gone as far as to outline what the hero's role may be. She highlights the work of Wes 'Scoop' Nisker to suggest that the foremost effect of such a person on their

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[54] Communal memorisation of individuals for positive reasons is perhaps the highest honour society can bestow as it publicly recognises the significance of their lives in the long term. For example, individuals who have died in combat in the armed forces are awarded what may be seen as an immortalisation of sorts in recognition of their services when their names are recorded on memorial plaques, often with accompanying text such as "we will remember them". Although it does not remain as a record of their personalities per se, it suggests that they had the personal qualities, such as bravery, that enabled them to have this social impact.

society as "…substituting one thing for another [to] create instability and uncertainty, making visible the lies imbedded in a culture" (Bornstein 1994 89). In this instance, the "thing" being substituted is the socially expected sexual partner or gender role.

It is important to note that part of this "making visible" (Ibid) results from the apparent violation of categories socially held as accurate, stable and certain. LGBTQ people may inadvertently suggest by their sheer existence that these categories may be mutable – the nature/nurture debate is not relevant here as it is the fact of their experiences and their realisation of what these may imply where the questioning of boundaries may occur. It is, however, the individual's acceptance of their LGBTQ status that Bornstein refers to as "the wisdom of simplicity and innocence" in their ability to see that these are "[cultural lies]" (1994 89). Their realisation disproves the 'fact' that it is impossible to 'be' outside of the structure by the virtue of their very being. LGBTQ people, therefore, demonstrate that not all socially-accepted givens represent a conclusive and compulsive behaviour blueprint.

However, in order to understand the fuller context of the position of LGBTQ people, and, therefore, their place within the social order, it is necessary to consider the implications of this realisation. They then have a choice. They can attempt to hide the personal facet that demonstrates the "[cultural lie]" (Ibid) by enacting the socially expected sex desire or gender role by complying with heterosexual culture, or they can actively question the status quo, as Bornstein comments, quoting Scoop Nisker:

> The great fool, like Einstein, wonders about the obvious and stands in awe of the ordinary, which makes him capable of revolutionary discoveries about space and time. The great fool lives outside the blinding circle of routine, remaining open to the surprise of each moment […] The revelations of the great

fool often show us where we are going, or – more often – where we are. (1994 89)

Bornstein therefore contends that those who live outside of social boundaries are in a unique position to be able to actively use their identity, and therefore the role that they play, to exemplify social boundaries' inherent incongruities:

> Well, they don't play by the rules, they laugh at most rules, and they encourage us to laugh at ourselves. Their pranks of substituting one thing for another create instability and uncertainly, making visible the lies imbedded in a culture [to] demonstrate the wisdom of simplicity and innocence. (Ibid 89)

Thesis respondent Kerryn Davey is one such 'fool'. A birth female performing as both a bio queen and drag king under the name Mingeeta Lickalotopus, her character actively mirrors her life as she is identified as a butch lesbian during the commentary and in promotional material for the venue at which she works. Davey describes Mingeeta as:

> …very sensual, supposed to be very sexy, she jokes about being butch but in most of my stuff, you know unless I'm impersonating a guy, that's the last thing I am. You know, I'll be wearing corsets and Basques and presenting a sort of picture of a female in the traditional senses, maybe even from the perspective of maybe how a straight man would want to look at a woman, you know, it's not some sort of - so lesbians look at me and idolise me as a lesbian role model. I go there to make people look at me and sort of enjoy the things I do that are a bit risqué and stuff like that. Not just find it funny and be vaguely attracted to it, but to be vaguely attracted to what I do right there and then regardless of what I do […] And she's very bold and dominatrixy and she's – you don't know with Mingeeta! I am the pub threat – people get out of hand and they threaten to send me over there and my numbers involve a whip and things like that. (Davey 2006n)

Mingeeta's identification encompasses both femme and butch stereotypes. Davey herself is referred to as being 'butch' by the other performers, despite considering herself and

appearing far closer to femme conventions, owing to her long hair and figure-hugging clothing. She appears to be conceptualised as butch in recognition of her sexual orientation, her approximation to the femme stereotype being striking from the point of view of unconventionality. It is the social reaction to sexuality that she exposes as a cultural "lie" (Bornstein 1994 89).

As detailed in the first chapter of this thesis, Davey uses her performances as a method of play to discover other aspects of her personality by gaining a range of other character perspectives when she performs as Mingeeta performing in another role, regardless of the gender represented. She particularly ascribes importance to the way in which the characters she performs are demonstrated, and states that she is "acting twice" (Davey 2006n). She is exploring not only her perceptions of the dualistic butch/femme Mingeeta, but also 'Mingeeta's' perceptions of other women and men. Davey comments that "…its not about sex, but just to be vaguely attracted to what I do right there and then regardless of whether they're a boy or a girl or whatever, just the whole ideal that I'm presenting" (Ibid).[55] As a result, her body of work can initially be seen to critique the notion that specific sexualities make the appreciation of other perspectives and visual tastes impossible. Her work, thus, directly contests the notion that a butch lesbian will or can only be sexually attracted to a femme lesbian, for example.

In addition, Davey's performance portrays a gradual deconstruction of the power of gender presentation itself. As Bornstein comments (1994), physical and behavioural connotations are a means to display the chosen identity of the individual, or in this case, both performer and character. As stated in Chapter One of this thesis, Davey and her audiences must have

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[55] For further discussion of the performativity of lesbian identity see Walker (1993) and Butler (2004).

the same perception of the connotations used if the performance is to be effective in projecting a concept. Davey comments that her style as Mingeeta remains within the context of a dominatrix, but uses different themes within that image. For example, one of Mingeeta's headdresses consists of a red bridal veil fitted with metallic Devil's horns. The layers of the veil are placed at the back of the headdress, traditionally connoting that the bride had married her spouse, ensuring her status as a functional component within the society. The horns would traditionally connate that her spouse is the Devil, or, to be less literal, Satanic thought. This suggests Mingeeta is versed in the various practices associated with the Devil. In this context, we may assume that this could mean unofficially prohibited sexual practices, perhaps in recognition that the venue, which caters for a community that is often taboo in a post-Christian society, is nevertheless present and provides a site for the community to reaffirm their identity. That the veil remains present suggests that Mingeeta is willing, but has not yet indulged in these practices. The resultant 'innocence', thus, gives full reign to the on-lookers' imagination, enabling the experimentation of both parties.[56] The perception of Mingeeta may, thus, be transformed from a 'dominatrix' who the club's commentary states has been in the Mafia, in keeping with her tag as "the butch one" (Davey 2006n) – an icon of a butch lesbian community, to one who, by virtue of the inclusion of a feminine ballerina's tutu, becomes a figurehead symbolising an amalgamation of different notions of sexuality. These incorporate both masculine and feminine connotations, complete with an idea of play.

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[56] Even if these nuances have not been considered, if the semiotic effects are subsumed, and the veil instead conceived purely as a device to attract attention, it is, nevertheless, attention based on the idea of taboo and enjoyment.

In short, ideas which may otherwise not be quite so appealing to a community, which Davey (2006h) describes as rife with internal, gender-role based divisions and an active notion of identity politics, unless foregrounded by some recognisably butch lesbian characteristic. Butler described this potential as follows:

> The resignification of norms is thus a function of their *inefficacy*, and so the question of subversion, of *working the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation. The critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders […] but rather with the exposure or the failure of heterosexual regimes ever to fully legislate or contain their own ideals. (1993 237)

In addition, Davey proves she can and does embody both heterosexuality and homosexuality, and as a result, defies the agency of both. Therefore, in her role within the venue's performative political community system, Mingeeta becomes a figurehead whose outfits may directly contrast with and, therefore, alter the perception of what butch lesbian sexuality may be seen to entail. She is exhibiting an assertive or culturally 'masculine' attitude to gaining experience, yet this is seen as a result of her femininity, as opposed to a particular wish to conform to socially perceived masculine characteristics, which would come at "the loss of some other [feminine] set of identifications", as Butler has observed (Ibid 126).

The "Fool's" initial innocent substitution becomes a desire to be mischievous or play Devil's Advocate by experimentation with, and disproval of, the necessity of expected social norms. In turn, the whole society must adjust to develop mechanisms for handling this demonstrated fallacy in order to continue to function.

Bornstein's quotation of the second and third sentences of the Nisker passage is also interesting, particularly in terms of "revelations" and her repetition of the proper noun "Fool" (1994 89). She comments that that she reads Tarot cards, and it is no coincidence that she cites LGBTQ people as "Fools" who "climb yet another step on the ladder of transgender evolution: [who] move toward some spiritual awareness and practice" (Bornstein 1994 92). This chapter will now argue how the "Fool" Tarot card can be seen as an elucidation of the role that the LGBTQ person may play within society.[57]

The "Fool" is one of the Trumps, Major Arcana, or main cards, and is often understood to describe fate, unchangeable characteristics, or the journey towards spiritual realisation (Greene 1992). A commonly used version of the card is described as follows:

> With light step, as if earth and its trammels had little power to restrain him, a young man in gorgeous vestments pauses at the brink of a precipice among the great heights of the world; he surveys the blue distance before him - its expanse of sky rather than the prospect below. His act of eager walking is still indicated, though he is stationary at the given moment; his dog is still bounding. The edge which opens on the depth has no terror; it is as if angels were waiting to uphold him, if it came about that he leaped from the height. His countenance is full of intelligence and expectant dream. He has a rose in one hand and in the other a costly wand, from which depends over his right shoulder a wallet curiously embroidered. He is a prince of the other world on his travels through this one – all amidst the morning glory, in the keen air. The sun, which shines behind him, knows whence he came, whither he is going, and how he will return by another path after many days. He is the spirit in search of experience. Many symbols of the Instituted Mysteries are summarized in this card, which reverses, under high warrants, all the confusions that have preceded it. (Waite 1999 84-85)

In this description, the Fool's countenance is "full of intelligence and expectant dream" (Ibid) implying he is aware of his circumstances and the opportunities they make available.

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[57] Since this chapter was written, personal communication with Bornstein has revealed she has begun to design a specifically LGBTQ Tarot pack. The initial information concerning her concept can be seen in Bornstein (2006).

The personified sun, acting as a representation of the physical world, apparently "knows" his fate, suggesting that that he has a preordained, physical purpose in society, as is also implied by the purse he carries. The sun is also suggestive of growth (due in part to photosynthesis), as well as divine inspiration (due to its position in the cosmos) and connotes that the character's purpose is also connected to esotericism. Just as the LGBTQ person waits to understand the implications of their social and personal purpose, so too does the Tarot Fool.[58]

The Tarot Fool card reveals Bornstein's concept of this purpose. The card is emblematic of personal journey, and the wording "[he] is *the* spirit in search of experience" (author's italics) elevates both the Fool as person and the Fool as concept to a religious context (Waite 1999 84-85). He is the embodiment of the notion of being in search of experience, either its godhead, or its vicar.[59] In the Christianised context of the Tarot (Waite 1999), the phrase is reminiscent of the Biblical phrase "I am the resurrection" (*New Revised Standard Version – NRSV – Bible*: John, 11:25). This is particularly due to the definite article, which suggests that his way is the prime method to achieve the experience, in this case the Christian judgement and afterlife. This is confirmed in the verse's continuation:

> I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (*NRSV Bible*: John, 11:25-6)

While Christian belief holds judgement to be the prerogative of a supernatural being, the method of conveying news of the promise of further resurrections or spiritual ascendance

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[58] Ironically, another interpretation has the dog biting the youth, who walks toward his destruction at the cliff face. However, such an interpretation may only apply in systems where the appearance of the reversed card is totally indicative of the negative interpretation. Alternative interpretation holds that both perspectives are representative, being the positive and negative aspects of the same issue (Waite 1999).

[59] The noun "spirit" can also be seen as a direct counter-part to the Holy Trinity of the Holy Spirit.

based on the belief in, and concurrence with, a Fool-Hero, in this case Jesus Christ, is carried through the memory of the populous in the form of the Bible. Thus, the utilisation of the symbolism of the Tarot also suggests that the LGBTQ Fool may also achieve an afterlife of sorts through the populous' memories of their as lives as 'heroes', and in turn may inspire others to follow them. However, the quotation raises issues of agency – the person needed to communicate the word of the godhead to others, to enable those who are likely to "[believe]" in (Ibid), or follow the Fool-Hero's ways, to benefit.[60]

On the other hand, Bornstein's vision for the role of the LGBTQ Fool-Hero is not in the form of a sermonising priesthood. She instead likens it to that of the tribal shaman, whose role and life she describes as such:

> What's supposed to happen in the instant/eternity between death and re-birth is that the spirits give the shaman a portion of the truth to take back to this world – a tiny grain of sand from the vast beaches of universal truth. But there's a catch. The shaman can only hang on to that portion of the truth if she or he tells it to others. If the shaman fails to reveal that portion of the truth continually to others, then the shaman is driven mad by the spirits. (1994 94)

Such a thesis places high validity on the subjective experience of the shaman, or indeed any individual, as opposed to on the objectivity of the action performed. At first, this would appear to reduce the importance of the observation. It reflects a specific individual who is the product of a particular (and unusual) set of cultural circumstances, making generalisation even amongst a group of similar people - it could not be guaranteed that all male-to-female transsexual, Jewish, previously Scientologist, pagan, previously married, fathers would have the same experience. What is more is the extreme subjectivity of the

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[60] A concept inherent in other main comparative religions. The Christian version is given here due to the modern Tarot's Christianised interpretation.

experience. While describing a scene – a beach – and an action – being given a "tiny grain of sand" (Ibid), it is notable that the section can (as the current time) only empirically be described as religious interpretation of a metaphor, a way of describing the intangible, an emotion or (considering the surgical procedure) a drug-induced dream. The literary validation of the piece – the acceptance of knowledge – is objectively the hardest to prove with empirical data: Bornstein had gender-reassignment surgery; she did not die or presumably even come close to death.

However, the validity of the piece lays not in its objectivity, but the perspective's impact on Bornstein's life, and indeed on those of her readers. Regardless of the biological construction of the emotions or concept of selfhood, it is a powerful motivator that can, nonetheless, change the objective course of a person's life by altering the situations they place themselves into – where they go and who they meet. Even if one argues against the notion of the shaman, it cannot be denied that the utilisation, or making physical, of Bornstein's theory had had a significant impact on the world. She is a successful author, playwright and public speaker whose work is taught in education institutions across the world. Her work is used to elucidate the social construction of an individual's purpose – regardless of whether its genesis is based on the objective-tangible or on something intangible that can nevertheless lead to physical change.

Judith Butler's comments on the nature of LGBTQ people and their subsequent place within the socially-constructed meanings system can give further insight into the person's social purpose when giving their "portion of the truth" to others (Bornstein 1994 94). In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'sex',* Butler argues that discourse must continually reiterate notions of sex and social understandings of the body as "bodies never

quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled" (1993 2). She then comments that

> Such attributions or interpellations contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as "the human". We see this most clearly in the example of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question. (Ibid 8)

This statement gives credence to the notion that the dialogue concerning an LGBTQ persons' humanity, as raised within the concept of normative social criteria, is indeed what makes this social priestly role possible. The communities' perception of the shaman in fact enables their role. A dualism exists in a number of examples of LGBTQ criticism. Theorists, including Butler herself, as can be seen in the preface to *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'sex'* (1993)*, display a tendency to write in two different styles. The first is the more obviously academic, in which the esoteric and theoretical issues of text are raised (for example, "[the] camera of course plays precisely to this desire", Butler 1993 133). The second is an almost confessional style which documents the impact of the creation of the theory and the critic's personal relationship to it (for example, "'… a white, Jewish lesbian from Yale', an interpellation which also implicates this author in its sweep" 1993 133). The 'humanness' of the author is highlighted as the reader is made aware of them as a private person disclosing personal views on a deeply personal subject.

The author's evaluation of their own relationship to these differences, on the other hand, causes them to seem intellectually more than human, being possessed of the ability and intent to evaluate these perhaps hidden relations. They are indeed the Fools who seek to question the unknown, apparently invisible power relations within society, regardless of

how far into the process they have gone. For example, in respondent Rose's (2006) statement "[LGBTQ identities are] not normal [...] not the norm. It's not like I'm saying it's not normal because it's strange, it's because you're not the same as them… why am I worse than [them]?" Such a role is indeed priestly in seeking to gain understanding of the world and its social functions. Perhaps what makes such critics utterly compelling and, therefore, able to convey their message, is their very humanity – their willingness to speak and allow themselves to become a subject of discussion. One appreciates others' experiences more deeply once one encounters or empathises with them directly, and the critic's honesty illustrates another aspect of the dual nature of the LGBTQ priests: their ability to communicate comes from stating their own experience in terms so bold and personal, that they appear both more human due to the effect of such honesty on the reader, and at the same time achieve an almost carnivalesque air of super humanity, one that is capable and willing to understand and feel all human experience, and to guide others on the journey. The concept recalls Mary Beth Edelson's notion of "offering 'images of [the] body as a stand-in for the Goddess'" (Carlson 1998 149). It offers a site for the articulation of these ideals, but with the important bridging aspect that, as the body is only a 'stand-in' or perhaps a cipher for the idea of the divine or theoretical, it is still able to link directly to human experience, precisely because of its materiality.

Bornstein cites The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as such Fool-Heroes (npg., accessed 10th September 2008). They are a community organisation that utilise performance, but who do not discuss on their website any of the personal near-death experiences that Bornstein stated were part of the shamanic experience! This obviously raises questions as to Bornstein's utilisation of the term shaman, as she herself states a connection between shamanism and mortality (1994 94). However, anthropological sources will now

demonstrate that there is historical precedence for the notion that changing personal identity, rather than near-death experience, is the initiatory prerequisite for the role. This is cited in Laurence Senelick's "The Sham in Shaman":

> Among the Pelew islanders, the phenomenon of men dressing and behaving like women for life was believed to occur when a female spirit chose a man as her inspired mouthpiece. In a number of cases, the shamanic sex change occurs in order to merge with an androgynous divinity: for the Sious it is the moon, the Altais a Supreme Being referred to as 'mother and father of man'. Among the Araucanians of the Southern Andes, sex-changing shamans are taken to be manifestations of a bisexual supreme deity. (2000 19)

This raises questions concerning the motivation for the individual's change. In this example, the emphasis is placed on the influence of external agency, that is, the change is said to occur when the person is *chosen*. This is, however, open to interpretation, as Senelick suggests that:

> The reasons for a shaman turning into a woman, a shamaness into a man, are manifold: possession by a spirit or the spirit's search for a mate, the need to communicate with a divinity of the opposite sex, the desire to assume certain attributes associated with one's sexual antithesis. (Ibid 18-19)

In this case, the agent of change is uncertain, as it is suggested the role is assumed in accordance with the shaman's own "need" or "desire" to "[transfigure] into a heightened self [or gain] a total identification with what lies opposite or beyond" (Senelick 2000 18).[61]

It is important at this point to note that there are debates as to the shaman's own perception of the shamanic art, as is illustrated in Gloria Flaherty's, "The Performing Artist as the

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[61] The utilisation of identification with another persona is a technique that is still in usage today in both Eastern and Western magical techniques. See "The Assumption of God Forms" in Tindsley (2002).

Shaman of Higher Civilisation" (1988). Anthropologists have understood the practice in ways that range from rationalisation to the suspension of disbelief to the point of an adoption of the respondents' faith. Johann Georg Gmelin perceived that the use of sleight-of-hand in rituals constituted sheer confidence trickery and was evidence that, contrary to the shaman's claims, they did not actually believe they were communicating with spirits (Flaherty 1988). At best, this perspective suggests the shaman uses their communities' naivety to enable them to act in their best interests; at worst that they aimed to use their deception to strike fear and awe into their fellow citizens purely to further their own interests. Conversely, Paul Egede found shaman who appeared to retain their belief to the extent of incorporating missionaries' Christianity into their worldview and ritual structure (Ibid).[62] Claude Levi Strauss deemed the activities to be a ritualised form of psychoanalysis (Ibid), regardless of whether the shaman believed they were communicating with spirit entities or consciously utilising a concept similar to Jungian archetypes as a means to resolve dilemmas by offering advice from a variety of character-based perspectives (Young-Esindrath and Dawson 1997). As Flaherty asserts, for any shaman to be able to appear to interact with any such force suggests a degree of innate showmanship and charisma, thus the role of the audience – or the shaman's community - must also be considered. The shaman's 'star quality' could easily have been interpreted as a form of super-humanity, as Flaherty asserts (1988). This makes possible the role's social function through the individual's personal popularity, as this would facilitate the resolution of conflicts and encourage the community to engage in ritual activities simply to spend time, and be associated with, the shaman.

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[62] For example, a shaman stated he knew the Christian Heaven existed and was beautiful as he had visited it himself while spirit journeying (Flaherty 1988).

Such debates demonstrate that the function of the tribal shaman as an elder of their community, as opposed to as the broker of contact with an external spirit world, is the universal factor of their role. Therefore, the role assumed by Bornstein's (1994) LGBTQ Fool-Hero is also based on the activities and role performed, rather than contact with external spirit agencies. Bornstein's own concept of LGBTQ shamanism is also based on experience, perhaps on a more secular level, as she states:

> [Shamanism] all sounded fairly esoteric until I put it into the terms of my very un-esoteric life. I died a virtual death, not only on the operating table, but in terms of a key aspect of my identity, and then I was reborn into the world. For me, the in-between place itself was the truth I was made aware of: the existence of a place that lies outside the borders of what's culturally acceptable. (Bornstein 1994 94)

Having established the esoteric basis for shamanism and the social role it facilitates, it is necessary to consider that the activities it may entail are also a subject of debate. In a review of Aldhouse-Green's *The Quest for the Shaman: Shape-shifters, Sorcerers and Spirit-Healers of Ancient Europe* (2005), Hutton comments:

> The problem that has developed is the total lack of any agreed definition of what a shaman actually is or was, and therefore of what 'shamanism' actually represents. To some a shaman is anybody who is supposedly expert in dealing with a spirit world to assist other people in the same community. More often, the term is restricted to such experts in tribal societies, and, still more often, to individuals who communicate with spirits or deities by going into trance. Increasingly, the lack of precision accorded to the terms is causing anthropologists themselves to abandon them as more productive of confusion than useful analysis. (Hutton 2005 64)

From the evidence of anthropological sources discussed, Bornstein herself can be seen as a shaman (1994).[63] Her work, which ranges from counselling in the form of self-help manuals (Bornstein 2006) to writing her own theatre performances, such as "Hidden: A Gender" (Bornstein 1994), could indeed be seen to have "[revealed her] portion of the truth continually to others" (Bornstein 1994 94).

As a result, Bornstein's reference to The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is also appropriate, despite the contextual differences (1994). The group use their LGBTQ status to aid their spiritual development and in doing so, contribute a particular role to their community by performing as a demonstration of the incongruities of personal identity. Their utilisation of a nun's garb is reflective of the universal cultural acceptance of the notion that clothing magically transforms the wearer. The 'spirit model' of magical efficacy suggests that the use of attributions particular to the supernatural force entices it to aid the shaman in the stipulated task.[64] This assertion – and the implicit way in which the shaman aids his community – is only appropriate in a paradigm in which the shaman is open to the belief that these entities exist. In a society that does not hold these beliefs, the effect of the clothing is psychological (but not in the magic-based use of the term), relying on a communal recognition of the artefacts to override the cultural symbols given by the Fool-Hero's biological sex. This causes the shaman to appear in the manner merited by the artefacts apparent, enabling them to respond with behaviour appropriate to the gender they are representing. In contexts where religion, belief or spiritual/personal progression is a recognised cultural force, this enables the shaman to transcend their biological sex and

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[63] As opposed to a shamanka, as she has changed sex from male to female.
[64] For definitions of magical models, see Tindsley (2002). For further information on the historical precedence of these models, see Chambers' *The Medieval Stage,* quoting *The Golden Bough* (1903).

humanity, enabling them to become a manifestation of the force they seek to project.[65] The

Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence state on their website that it facilitates their activities:

> We are very dedicated to our calling and our vows reflect our commitment to our community. If you look at the work traditional nuns do, and then look at the work we do, you will find many similarities. They minister to their community. We minister to our community. They raise funds for the needy. We raise funds for the needy. They are educators. We are educators. See any significant differences? The list goes on and on. (npg., accessed 10th July 2006)

For instance,

> Sister Rox! has long seen herself as a bridge between men and women and between the gay and straight worlds. With the body of a woman and the sexual desires of a gay man, Sister Rox! considers herself "half-gay" and openly defies gender norms while embracing her own form of "androgenius". Since taking her final vows in the year 2000, she has continued her gentle campaign to educate, liberate and fornicate. (Ibid, accessed 10th July 2006)

Bornstein implies that true Fools are by nature "transgender" (Bornstein 1994 92). The term

"transgender" appears to denote one who transgresses gender representation boundaries as

part of their performance. Such is also the insinuation for the examples of the community

shaman shown above, where Sister Rox!'s account emphasises her conceptualisation of her

own physicality as "androgenius" (npg., accessed 10th July 2006), which, although a comic

and apparently frivolous term, nevertheless indicates serious intent. It apparently derives

from her conceptualisation of her gender and sexual identity as a cross between traditional

male and female, straight and gay models. It is implied that this informs her "androgenius"

(Ibid), which (a compound of the two words, 'androgyne' and 'genius') suggests the

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[65] As in the case of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who state that their attire is designed to "[fit] in with [their] community" (npg., accessed 7th July 2006).

unification of traditional identity models results in a superior understanding of their context.

Moreover, this informs her understanding and physical representation of what she believes to be the best and most suitable conceptualisation of individual sexuality. Therefore, the suggestion remains that in order to be able to minister for the public, the shaman must themselves be transgendered. The notion of a shamanic, fixed gender identity does, however, pose potential difficulties for the provision of a pastoral role. As Butler comments:

> Pastoral power is thus that form of power by which the administration of the soul takes place. The claim to really know the soul of the other, and to be in a position to direct that soul toward good conscience and salvation is a powerful one, and only certain well-trained individuals are in a position to make it. By accepting the knowledge about themselves that is offered, those souls who are administered in this way come to accept that the pastor has an authoritative discourse of truth about who they are, and come to speak about themselves through the same discourse of truth. (2004 161-162)

If we read this statement replacing the word "soul" (Ibid) with the word 'gender', we can see that the activity ceases to become emancipatory, merely placing another set of stereotypes on the Querent, or those seeking advice, as the pastor becomes their role model. Therefore, it makes sense that another model of imparting gender is found, one not constricted by a fixed identity. In order to do this, this chapter will now demonstrate how Bornstein's theorised LGBTQ priesthood may be modified to provide less constrictive guidance, both to LGBTQ groups and to mainstream society.

In a number of cultures, pagan festivities incorporated cross-dressing to celebrate the coming of summer (and in some instances continue to do so). The primary historical basis for this assertion is that the traditions evolved into the festivities of the English Mummers plays, where males continued to play female parts in stories that have been argued as representing fertility rituals (Miller 1996 and Brody 1971).[66] There is no evidence to suggest that these males were considered to be transgender beyond the parameters of their performances.[67] It is their willingness to adopt the feminine role and engage in subsequent understandings that effectively transgenders them.

Roger Baker provides a useful distinction to understand the phenomenon, suggesting that this 'drag queen' has both a "secular" and "sacred" face and function (1994 23). The "secular" is essentially defined as human interaction, while the "sacred" is the personified representation of, and brief affinity with, a spiritual figure (Ibid).[68] The Mummers plays may not constitute 'serious transgendered performance' as they utilise comic imagery (somewhat inherent when a large male physically attempts to portray female form) and do not overtly aim to engage a particular gender discourse. They are, however, a serious representation of religious belief, and would be treated as such by the performers. The comedy acts not, as Baker (1994 29) asserts, to "diffuse" the effect of the drag queen, but to highlight the incongruity of the performance and put the audience at their ease in order to

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[66] Whose characters were so important their names have survived. See "Of Agricultural Worship" in Chambers (1903).

[67] Leslie Feinberg has stated that such activists were "crossed-gendered because they didn't just cross-dress, they also adopted the names, identities and familial relationships of another sex" (1996 75). Feinberg also refers to Davies (1975) to support his case. However, in doing so he appears to actually misrepresent the situation, as there is no indication that the protesters' actions were performed for anything other than political expediency. Practically speaking, it may well have been more possible for a male protestor to merge into the populous if he made the effort to "curl the coiffed horsehair [wig]" rather than simply looking like an imposter (Feinberg 1996 75). It does not denote a wish to change sex or gender role.

[68] See Chambers (1903 and 1933) and Brody (1971). The practice continues today in neo-pagan festivities where male and female (not necessarily cross-dressed, although this does happen) are physically represented to honour a physical representation of the divine and pray, or magically work, for good harvests. This is the practice at the Oakleaf Circle Pagan camp (currently held in Masham, Yorkshire).

deliver the more serious religious message through a play engendering liminality. A personal 'queering' occurs when one consciously utilises clothing perceived as particular to the opposite gender. Prior to the performance, the wearer focuses on the person they become in these clothes, and will psychologically integrate this new identity into their own concept of self as that character for the duration of the performance. This is particularly because they are playing to an audience of their own community, and are, thus, aware of how they will be perceived as individuals and within their vicarious role. As a member of their community, they do indeed combine the faces of the "secular" with the "sacred" (Baker 1994 23) aspects of the divine concept they are attempting to embody. The newly transgendered actor represents the epitome of female mystery due to the personal regeneration of the ritual play.

Rather than either the sacred or the secular element "[diffusing]" (Ibid 29) the other to make the performance 'suitable' as a religious text, part of the power of the performance comes from the realisation of both the audience and the actor that the so-called sacred and profane can be present at the same time. In communicating religious plays and ideation, the presentation of the main character by an actor of the opposite sex – that which is 'other' – represents a form of profanity. Miller calls this effect the "'lie' at the heart of theatre" – that "its actors pretend to be someone they are not", where "the starkest example of that impersonation […] comes in cross-dressing" (Miller 1996 2). It focuses the narrative on the ability of the actor's body to convey esoteric messages regardless of the individual's

physiological sex – and begins the process of questioning what other socially accepted boundaries may be traversable.[69]

Gender-crossing performance enables an evaluation of other social systems as it is shamanic to the extent of its ability to confer on the individual the power to assume the role of the community educator and leader, as Bornstein observes:

> [The] fool became the fool by flexing the rules, the boundaries of the group, and this is antithetical to the survival dynamic of most groups. A group remains a group by being inflexible; once it stretches its borders, it's no longer the same group. A fool, in order to survive, must not identify long with any rigidly-structured group. When more and more of the fool's work is done for a particular identity-based group, the fool becomes *identified* with the group. The fool is indeed foolish who serves a special interest, and will quickly cease being a fool. (1994 92)

The role of the theatrical cross-dresser is a highly practical one not solely concerned with spiritual development and realisation. As Miller comments, "The woman-man of folk drama would develop into characters such as these subversive transvestites, but she developed her role offstage as well. Revolutionary actors took the lessons of misrule and applied them outside the bounds prescribed" (1996 4). Instances of this are illustrated by the Wiltshire rebellions of 1641, and 'General Ludd's wives' in Gloucester in 1812, amongst others, all of which utilised cross-dressing:

> In 1641, in the dairy and grazing sections of Wiltshire, bands of men rioted and levelled fences against the king's enclosure of their forests. They were led by men dressed as women, who called themselves "Lady Skimmington." In May 1718, Cambridge students followed "a virago, or man in woman's habit,

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[69] In a similar way to the concept that the wording of religious texts contributes to their status as sacred artefacts because the work supposedly represents Divine inspiration. See "verbal inspiration" in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (npg., accessed 10th July 2006).

crowned with laurel" to assault a Dissenting meeting house. Two years later, labourers in Surrey rioted in women's clothes, and at mid-century country men disguised as women tore down the hated tollbooths and turnpike gates at the Gloucestershire border. (Davies 1975 148)

The physical effects of these skirmishes ranged from what might be viewed as vandalism motivated by the need to express a political message, to the actual destruction of tollbooths, perceived in this instance as an instrument of financial oppression. Davies comments that under the law of the period, women were not considered accountable for their actions, due to perceptions of femininity connoting foolishness in the "Dame Folly" tradition (1975 147). Thus, by utilising feminine garb, the male rioters masked their identities and were able to blame any unlawful activities on their women-folk and, therefore, ensured a lesser sentence for themselves.

However, in a shamanic context, it is telling that Davies states that in those times "women could pronounce on law and doctrine only if they were queens, had unusual learning, or fell into an ecstatic trance" (Ibid 146). Over and above Davies' thoughts on the men's utilisation of the female image, the shamanic males (and any females present) were able to use the perceived frivolity associated with femininity, the mental abandon connoting ecstatic trance, to enable them to think creatively and use the disguise to communicate their political point. As she then comments:

> [The] males drew upon the sexual power and energy of the unruly woman and on her license (which they had long assumed at carnivals and games) – to promote fertility, to defend the community's interests and standards, and to tell the truth about unjust rule. (Ibid 149-150)

They gained the backing of their community using a disguise that had traditionally been associated with joyous fertility rituals (perhaps implying that the use of the clothing could ensure a beneficial outcome), and, thus, aided the shamanic leader to affect the changes desired. The disguising costume enables the shaman to do more than temporarily inhabit the power of their society's image of the feminine, but to in fact embody the theological carnivalesque principal associated with fertility which was held to conduct regeneration and change.

However, considering oneself a shamanic leader, and appropriating the role regardless of support, is very different to being proposed by the community and actually being given a series of behavioural powers with which to lead. These are the differences between the essentially intellectual, pastoral role of the modern shaman, and the political role through which issues with external communities must be handled.[70] As a result, there are discrepancies in the argument that LGBTQ people are in a social position to act as the communities' shamanic leaders. The first discrepancy is the authority that enables them to lead, whilst the second is the decisions to be made. In tribal cultures, the shaman was often marked by transgender appearance or behaviour – commonly effeminacy in males. This was considered to indicate that the spirits had chosen a person in possession of the necessary clairvoyant qualities to fulfil the role. Today, leadership and authority is formally conferred by a vote of the community, or in a general show of support, often after the person demonstrates their leadership qualities through their activities.[71] This is the case with many of those involved in the LGBTQ civil rights movement. Yet how is the site of

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[70] Of course, the latter function was also a central part of the traditional community shaman's role.

[71] In the current political landscape, where, despite parliamentary votes formally conferring on candidates the position of leader, there is nevertheless often speculation as to whether the candidate has the personal characteristics, such as charisma (or to use the shamanically associated term, showmanship) that are popularly associated with the office.

the leader's power to be identified, particularly in a community marked by its diversity and differing personal attributes, yet where no quantifiable criterion can demonstrate whether a candidate can lead others on a course of action they have themselves decided? This question is of particular pertinence when one considers the impact of notional equality – when no form of sexual or gender identification and subsequent boundary-crossing is held as more advanced than another.[72]

Butler argues that this power of decree (and, thus, the statement of prescribed action) is the citation of pre-defined authority:[73]

> Hence, the judge who authorises and installs the situation he names invariably *cites* the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power. And though it may appear that the binding power of his words is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is truer; it is *through* the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's 'will' is produced and that the "priority" of textual authority is established. (1993 225)

It is necessary to demonstrate that this is not strictly the case in order to detail how the formulation of the concept of law makes possible the shaman's role of ongoing leadership. In the legal system, the judge cites the law that enables them to formally sentence. They are, however, able to decide the terms of its application within a series of pre-set tariffs and, therefore, give the law as theoretical concept its actual physical presence. The law itself is a formal acceptance of a collection of theories generated through parliamentary Acts – Acts proposed by people and given common parliamentary assent. More importantly, however, it is the willingness of others to recognise and accept the judges' decision and authority that

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[72] Although, as Bornstein notes, there can be a hierarchy in terms of the individual perception (1994).
[73] In the same theoretical vein as Butler's comments on gender in "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault" (Butler 1998 615).

enable the sentence to be followed, rather than appealed. Simply citing a law does not enforce it – recognition of the judges' behaviour as a mark of authority does.

There are also accepted behaviours in the LGBTQ community, often associated with the embodiment of 'othered' sexuality or gender role. The knowledge of what this otherness entails – its behaviour – is the physicality of the trans-boundary shamans, and their site of power. They *are* the law by virtue of the fact of their being. As they develop their own notions of identity and social structure – and importantly demonstrate the implications, they change what is considered to be possible. A particular instance of this can be seen in the case of Dave Dale, considered by the respondents interviewed in *Men in Frocks* to be

> …one artist whom everyone from the far edges of the gay movement and the gay scene seems to admire. His existence shows that an intelligent and thinking artist can tackle ambitious subjects and still hold a pub audience's attention…he has been concerned to stretch drag until it almost snaps, examining on stage what it means to be a drag queen […] and continually questioning his audience's preconceptions. (Kirk and Heath 1984 124-126)

This forms a part of a non-repressive discourse in which the pastors' role is not tied to their own, predefined aims, but enables communities which Butler determines are

> … not to be discovered but to be constituted through force of truth. The force lies in the rhetorical quality of the master's discourse, and this rhetorical quality depends for a part on the exposure of the disciple, who has to explain how far he is in his way of living from the true principles that he knows. (2004 163)

In turn, this can affect the decisions made by the community - as can be seen by the various political groups, such as Outrage! and Stonewall, who then campaign to challenge external oppression. Their law of simply 'being' can itself be formally agreed and written down as

the constitution of the type held by many political groups (Jay and Young 1992). These are actually operated to allow for the development of new structures and facilitate the individuals to become community educators, pastors, and political leaders. These leaders perform to educate and encourage their communities about the potential social role of the LGBTQ person and also empower them by voicing this message.

In conclusion, the realisation that one's sexuality or gender status contradicts expected social roles causes a reconceptualisation of the potential 'purpose' of the individual. Precedents for such a role exist in anthropological accounts of tribal shaman, who utilised cross-gendered identities to guide their communities in pastoral matters. However, specific LGBTQ identities are not a pre-requisite for this role, as much as a willingness to engage in othered gendered behaviours which enable an understanding of one's community and provide the shaman with the power to display their own 'law' as mutable. As a result, they are able to lead their communities both in spiritual matters, and in those concerned with the liaison with the external social groups. In short, those willing to embrace cross-gendered identities are modern day shaman.

Chapter Three: What's Our Message?

> [There] is a language and a rhetoric of comedy as well established and as practical in its assumptions as the language and rhetoric of public speaking. Comedy, too, is an art of persuasion… (Charney 1980 9)

Charney's notion of comedy as an "art of persuasion" (Ibid) is central to conveying the message of modern drag performance. The previous chapter considered what has been termed as 'the search for heroes' alongside the writings of Kate Bornstein and a number of anthropological sources in order to argue the social importance of the willingness to understand and appreciate non-heterosexual and, potentially, transgender identities. Furthermore, it posited that this enables LGBTQ citizens to act as social leaders through their ability to decipher and critique previously accepted norms. The next obvious question, therefore, is the method through which these LGBTQ shaman become figureheads of their communities in order to spread knowledge of their discoveries.

With reference to Kevin McNeal's performance ethnography "Behind the Make-Up: Gender Ambivalence and the Double-Bind of Gay Selfhood in Drag Performance" (McNeal 1999) this chapter will argue that despite disparate geographical and community settings, drag performance conveys a number of political ideologies concerning gender and identity. Using ethnographic analysis, it will then contrast performances at The Birdcage (in Leeds), @D2 (in Nottingham), The New Penny (in Leeds) and artist Chloe Poems' one-off appearance at a night club aimed at heterosexuals in Manchester. This will demonstrate how the style and content of the performances is influenced by factors including the anticipated audience and local geographical community. The analysis will focus upon the suggested sexuality of the performers and the notion of a community space to examine how

they are used by the performers to instigate interaction and an empathetic relationship with the audience. Each performance will be shown to indicate how the drag artists develop artistically while drawing their audiences' attention to social and identity-based issues without alienating them as paying clients. Methods to achieve this aim will be shown (with reference to the criticism of Maurice Charney 1980 and Davis Rider Robinson 1999) to include performance techniques such as comedy and the utilisation of popular culture as a means of establishing interaction. It will show how the performances constitute a dialogue on the role of modern drag with the communities' grass-roots, who have variable social and personal expectations.

Now, local drag performance is not the sole preserve of the LGBTQ community, as Kirk and Heath (1984) have documented had historically often been the case. The visual spectacle of drag has become more acceptable to mainstream audiences as a result of its similarities with pantomime (Mander and Mitchenson 1973) and the popularity of cross-dressed television entertainers such as Danny La Rue and Lily Savage.[74] As a result, drag performance has also become more widespread as entertainment on the local club circuits and its popularity has ensured its diversification. In addition to openly political drag acts, there are others offering an approach utilising characters and musical sets that are more readily comparable with vaudeville (Mander and Mitchenson 1973). Though diverse in the form and content of their displays, these various performers are connected by their cross-dressed attire. In order, therefore, to qualitatively assess the performances and messages purveyed by the modern drag community, it is important to evaluate a sample group that represents the entertainment offered across the spectrum (Gilbert 2005). Variables will comprise of venues catering for audiences with different anticipated sexualities by

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[74] For detailed discussion of La Rue and Savage, see the fifth chapter of this thesis.

providing disparate types of entertainment within the genre. Each analysis will encompass performance theory and ethnography, as drag is rarely limited to the concept of the theatrical fourth wall, and instead will often include techniques such as direct audience interaction.[75]

The first section of the chapter concerns a nightclub with a primarily heterosexual client base whose performers aim to entertain, albeit with a subtle political ideology. The second section will compare two nightclubs, both with predominantly LGBTQ audiences, that offer contrasting performances which aim to entertain, but whose ethos is geared toward the depiction of LGBTQ identities and providing services for their community. The final section will focus on a LGBTQ performer's didactic conveyance of a political perspective through entertainment in a predominantly heterosexual venue.

Before examining the community performers themselves, it must be made clear that their performances take place in a different entertainment context to those of the intentionally political drag displayed in the open public spaces where the Pride carnivals are based. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, carnival drag aims to educate its participants through the promotion afforded by occasional (often annual) special events held within the public sphere. In contrast, many venue-based drag performances take place frequently (often weekly) within permanent, enclosed settings. While the presentation of a performer whose attire or behaviour marks them as potentially LGBTQ could be construed as a political statement of visibility, this message can be subsumed by other aspects of the setting. The shift in the temporality and environment of the community events causes a difference in

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[75] For the analysis to be manageable in a thesis of Doctoral length, this sample group is necessarily restricted to four diverse acts.

emphasis and outcome. The community events are not 'one-offs' designed to engender change, but reflect variable levels of the communities' desire for stability as they instead highlight the continuation of a weekly routine. This is particularly the case in venues like those of the sample group (The Birdcage, The New Penny, and @D2) where a regular audience and performers' weekly attendance may limit the potential for the liminal game-playing otherwise offered by a carnivalesque, holiday atmosphere (Bernstein 1986). In such venues, both the performers and the audience bring variable aims and objectives week by week – but will, nevertheless, attend with a reasonable knowledge of the entertainment, the social groupings of attendees, and the established modes of appropriate conduct. Their willingness to engage in different activities and to be fully open to the surprise of the moment will be negated (Gilbert 2005). Participants will, in short, understand and enter into pre-established roles. These are likely to be an amalgamation of the norms of their immediate peers and the conventions they expect or encounter at the venue and its surrounding environment. These performances are far less a showcase for the benefit of outsider onlookers, as they are at the carnival, but are a reflection and, to some extent, a celebration of the individual's performance and the event's community.[76]

In order to argue that performance can be, and is, used to convey messages, it is firstly necessary to identify the messages' intended recipients, as they will influence its style and content. The Birdcage nightclub in Leeds' unique selling point is a relatively lavish drag cabaret performed twice a week. It has also played host to a "Drag Idol" talent contest, and as a result, it could be assumed that the venue would provide a reasonably large, central location catering for the LGBTQ community. This, however, appears to be a slight, though

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[76] "Community" here is used to mean a group of individuals who have come to the event with expectations of what they will see, rather than a community bound by constant attendance at the venue or one bound by a single common characteristic such as sexuality (Williams 1983).

understandable, misnomer. Respondent Samuel Ball (2006), the former "Drag Hostess", described the venue as "mixed", meaning that it caters for both the homosexual and heterosexual communities.[77] Although The Birdcage is welcoming to the LGBTQ community, it is situated well outside of the area that houses the specifically LGBTQ orientated and run establishments. These are located towards the edge of the main city centre and offer a peer group and an understanding of their lives and culture. The Birdcage is, instead, found amidst a cluster of establishments that do not offer the entertainments or environment often associated with LGBTQ culture, thus rendering a visit from community members unlikely.[78]

It is important to establish how the venue's layout and décor may influence anticipated clientele and facilitate the conveyance of the messages inherent within the drag performances. Although the venue has some physical attributes that may be associated with LGBTQ culture, these are also able to reflect its primary clientele, heterosexual females. Whilst it no doubt reflects the calculative media market based on economic rather than communicative processes, the quality of the audience's experience is, nevertheless, of utmost importance in order to market the product (McQuail 1997). This demonstrates that drag entertainment has diversified and can appeal to the mainstream community in which it is geographically situated. Outside the venue, a television screen details special offers and photographs, depicting a 'party' style atmosphere. It features images of the drag show alongside crowds comprised mainly of young, dancing females. The appearance of these women is not suggestive of the lesbian stereotype, as most have physical attributes

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[77] Ball is in his mid-twenties, is from Wakefield, and is Caucasian. He toured the world as a violinist before developing his drag act. He has performed in drag all over the world.
[78] The Birdcage is one of a chain of venues owned by Pink Entertainments, whose webpage – despite a name connoting homosexuality – is adorned by a man and a woman who are obviously intended to be considered as a couple (npg.).

associated with femininity, such as long hair and revealing clothing (Probyn 1997). This suggests that the venue aims to attract a heterosexual female audience in order to encourage the attendance of heterosexual male customers in search of romantic liaisons, a target market confirmed by respondent Samuel Ball.[79] This is confirmed by the information on the venue's promotional website, which defines its speciality as catering for 'Hen Nights' – a rite-of-passage excursion where brides-to-be drink alcohol, dance, and socialise before symbolically committing themselves to their spouses (npg., accessed 10th August 2006).[80]

As a result, the design of the venue's geographical location and décor appears to be targeted to appeal to this female audience. It is located in a major pedestrian area alongside other bars and clubs, and has a glass frontage revealing the interiors' pink decor and a large, well-lit reception area. This gives the impression that the venue is open and inviting. On the other side of the door, a large, but comparatively understated painting of The Birdcage's logo is crowned with an effeminate drag queen sitting demurely sideways on, with her legs crossed. She wears a mini-dress that is not in itself evening attire, indicating that she is representative of the entertainment and not the clientele. While this logo connotes entertainment historically enjoyed by an LGBTQ audience, it also represents the glorification of feminine culture, as represented by the trappings of a costume that are highlighted as they alter the onlookers' perception of a male and render them recognisable as a female. The continuation of the thematic glorification of the feminine is visible through the glass frontage, revealing walls painted in a high tone of pink. The sheer volume of colour alludes to the venue's selling point: highly stylized entertainment aimed towards a female audience who are encouraged to luxuriate in an atmosphere promoting the self-

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[79] In Ball's (2006) words, "we target the girls who'll bring in the boys".
[80] This is the English variation of a widespread custom.

conscious construction of femininity, regardless of conformity to conventional desirability. It is, in short, a celebration of the social construct of womanhood.

The main client space is divided into four areas: a stage, progressing backwards to a lower and upper floor, and the lavatory/rest room. The stage is raised around a foot higher than the lower-level floor and is enclosed by the outer wall on one side and by the disc jockey's booth on the other. It is used by the drag artists when a performance is in progress, and as a dance floor by the clientele at other times.[81] This physically separates the performers from the audience during the show; though probably for health and safety reasons, this highlights their differences and gives the performers an air of the exotic. They are not, however, depicted as untouchable or aloof as the dual usage of the floor space creates a feeling of familiarity as they share the same territory with the audience. On the lower floor in front of the stage are a number of circular tables surrounded by chairs, and behind them is a wall mounted with railings that reach about four-feet high and mark the higher level. That furniture facilitating group conversation is given such prominence suggests the attempt to generate a friendly ethos within the venue.[82]

The entertainment is reflective of the information given on the venue's website. Prior to 10pm, when the first cabaret is staged, the venue is dedicated to dancing and interaction. Hen parties and those on the VIP guest list were met by Drag Hostess Samuel Ball (who has since left the venue and others have taken his place). 'Her' role was to show the clients

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[81] Probably in order to maximise the types of entertainment offered.

[82] The researcher spent some time talking to the security personnel about the club itself. Typically, they were positioned at strategic points. Although it was clear they were closely observing the scene and occasionally spoke to the clientele to disrupt any causes of minor concern, it seemed that part of their function was to maintain the club's friendly ethos, as they were often to be seen chatting happily to the guests. The other staff, such as the bar team, acted in a similar fashion, often seen dancing for short periods in between rushing round to carry out their duties.

around the venue and to their seats, before socialising and dancing with them. While the use of a named and advertised Drag Queen Hostess would suggest an immediate emphasis on the exotic and outlandish, Ball appeared to encourage the guests to feel comfortable. His manner was warm and friendly, and during our interview next to the bar area, he was frequently approached by regular clients who he had obviously befriended over an extended period of time. Ball's drag persona was presented in the tradition that aims to represent a normative female. During the fieldwork exercise, he wore a simple, v-necked blouse, tailored women's trousers, subdued evening make-up, and a realistic, short, brown, curled wig. Indeed, his presentation was so close to the female stereotype that he was hard to spot amongst the other clientele. Drag queens in the subtly glamorous style utilised by some of the performers at The Birdcage may appeal to modern Hen Night audiences as their appearance is a conceptual mixture of the glorification of feminine icons and the performers' male physique and demeanour.[83]

This creates other advantages for a venue aiming to attract a female clientele. As the publicity stipulates that the entertainers are drag artists, the audience may assume that they are homosexual as a result of their willingness to display femininity in contrast to heterosexual male stereotypes. Therefore, in the presence of non-heterosexual males (who will not, they assume, find them sexually attractive) any pressure the women may feel to look attractive, rather than enjoy the entertainment, is alleviated. To a group of women out for the evening, the drag queen is seen neither as an unknown female competitor nor a maternal authoritarian who will judge or query their behaviour (Rupp and Taylor 2005).

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[83] This perspective of drag queens was suggested by respondent Kerryn Davey, and was based on her observations of the behaviour of her fellow male performers. It is in direct contrast to Marilyn Frye's rather generalised assertion that "gay man's effeminacy and donning of feminine apparel displays no love of or identification with woman or the womanly… It is a casual and cynical mockery of women" (quoted in Phelan 1993 162).

This allows the women to relax in their company and view the interaction with the drag performers as one which takes place on a basis of comradeship – a facet of the venue's style that will prove invaluable to the conveyance of the drag shows' messages.[84]

The venue's ethos is relaxed, as is its diverse audience.[85] Even early in the evening, many patrons were dancing – not only on the stage, but also in the aisles. The music was provided by the disc jockey, Miss Orry (pronounced with little emphasis on the 'o', thus sounding like 'misery', presumably to indicate a comically misanthropic drag persona) who took the clients' music requests when passed to her in the DJ box.[86] Featured tracks included Robbie Williams' "Rock DJ" (Williams 1999) and Blondie's "Maria" (Blondie / Destri 1999), both of which are staples of both heterosexual and LGBTQ venues (probably as a result of their simple beat, which facilitates dancing, and their expressiveness, which encourages mimed participation).[87] In keeping with the emphasis on the venue as a provider of celebratory events, Miss Orry also read out congratulatory notices from the clients to mark occasions such as birthdays and impending nuptials. Thus, the drag performer takes on the role as the audience's friend.[88]

Having established a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, Miss Orry encouraged the audience to move into more ribald territory by offering periodic, yet raucous, commentary on their

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[84] These observations were in direct contrast to those of McNeal (1999), possibly as a result of The Birdcage's drag queens' faux-glamorous style and the attention lavished on the female audience members to entertain rather than challenge them.

[85] They comprised a cross-section of society, ranging from groups of young women in the typical nightclub attire of short skirts and revealing upper garments, to women wearing day-time clothing, such as trousers and blouses, to men wearing formal shirts and those wearing baseball caps and t-shirts. Their ages ranged from approximately eighteen to fifty years old.

[86] 'Miss Orry' is in his early thirties, is from Huddersfield (in West Yorkshire) and has been performing professionally in musical theatre since the age of fifteen. He has performed in drag across the world.

[87] "Rock DJ" was parodied by the performers at @D2 during my field research.

[88] This presentation is somewhat at odds with the more common relationship, displayed in abundance at @D2, in which the communication between the drag queen and the audience is comically antagonistic. See also McNeal (1999).

sexual expectations and on hers and the staff's experiences - and presumably fictionalised lives.[89] Knowledge of the varied potential client group appeared to impact on The Birdcage's drag queens' performances. They would have been aware that the majority of their audience do not identify as LGBTQ. Interacting directly with the clientele, the Drag Queen hostess and Miss Orry made sexual allusions to themselves as female (though they were clearly not), often regarding imagined trysts with male audience members. As a result, there was a fine, theoretical line preventing the vocal confirmation that visual gender queering was occurring on stage, whether or not as an 'act', in front of the audience.

At these points, the performers apparently intended to be perceived as inhabiting a female role. As a result, they were able to refrain from any even jovial reference to what would in reality constitute homosexual relationships, either as male and male, or as male and transvestite, which would risk appearing to question the heterosexuality of their audience stooges and potentially cause consternation.[90] They were also at pains to reinforce the performative, playful contextualisation of their comments. These were bestowed using hyperbolised devices, such as asides and stage whispers, whilst retaining eye-contact, before tilting their heads in a different direction to look out of the corner of their eye. They then looked directly at the main audience, which acted as a distancing device reiterating their presence as performers on the stage. This severed the interactive bond with the individual stooges and, thus, the playful suggestion of relations. It also confirmed, both to

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[89] During the field research, the police entered the main club and walked amongst the customers for a short time. The researcher was informed later by a security guard that this was due to routine fire-safety monitoring. There did appear to be a disproportionate number of police and the researcher was uneasy, as others may have been. Miss Orry, however, effectively dispelled the tense atmosphere via jokes suggesting that the police may be strip-o-grams and by stating that she liked police as ejaculation wiped off their yellow visibility coats easily. Subsequent events at the venue suggest the police were more concerned with crowd control, and indeed, it did have a reputation for misconduct amongst local people. The researcher did not, however, witness anything approaching unruly behaviour during the field study.
[90] Such as is detailed in a reaction to a performer at *Charlie Brown's* night club in McNeal (1999).

the individual at whom the innuendo was aimed and to their potential peers, that the drag queens' actions were for their entertainment. It was intended to welcome them to the venue's community rather than to ridicule them. The comedy aimed to amuse through the contrast between the offer and the low appeal of the proposal – recast during the show as the offer of sexual relations with a rather brassy spinster, due to the drag persona. The oblique evocation of the homosexual taboo suggested that the audience could indulge in some supposedly transgressive behaviour whilst remaining within their sexual comfort zone. From that theoretical vantage point, they could begin to critique the performance's meanings from an outsider perspective before its relevance to their own lives and culture becomes apparent. The primary importance of these oblique allusions to homosexuality and gender-queering was to prepare both the audience and the artists for the performance, suggesting that, as the drag queens can play a female role, they can also be used to represent a female role model.

At 10pm, and thereafter periodically throughout the evening, the stage was cleared and the client-dancers moved back to main area with minimal hesitation to watch the cabaret. This indicated that they viewed the performance as an integral part of the event, and in no way as an interruption of their other activities. A projector screen displaying the club's promotional material (reiterating its status as a predominantly heterosexual venue) was lowered in front of the stage while it was dressed.

When the stage was set, Miss Orry moved next to the projector and mimed the female falsetto introduction to *The Best Little Whore House in Texas'* song "A Lil' Ole Bitty Pissant Country Place", (Hall 1982) while the projector showed the United States national flag, followed by a cartoon house. This is a traditional style of cabaret (Newton 1979) in

which the performers mime and act out the content of the song. It is an approach that is common to many LGBTQ venues where the artists either lack the inclination or the technical ability to sing the female roles convincingly. Miss Orry exited as the female dancers entered the stage dressed in the male drag of dungarees, although with undisguised feminine facial features and their own hair tied behind their heads in the ponytail style.[91] At this point the animation on screen changed to a series of revolving cartoon guns. The dancers performed a simple, two-minute long routine parodying the southern American 'redneck' stereotype, although beaming rather then gurning (as is often the case with such routines) presumably to prevent alienating the female audience by presenting them in a less than attractive manner. They left the stage as a male dancer entered and performed an acrobatic routine before exiting.[92] The projector withdrew to reveal the performers, sitting on bales of hay, represented as follows: a maid wearing a traditional smock, but substituting a negligee for an apron, dusting both the performers and the furniture whilst holding a Moses basket as a dustpan; a tall drag queen wearing a negligee and stomach padding to indicate pregnancy; and other performers who were playing female parts wearing similar negligee sets and blonde beehive-style wigs. Their activities revolved around occasional play-fights and comic erotic gestures, such as holding the male dancer and massaging his chest. During this display of supposedly deviant activity, Miss Orry stood at the front in a long, glittering, red dress, miming the narration to the song, which described her house as an uneventful place where "nothing ever happens" (Hall 1982) while simultaneously listing the exact compromising sexual situations being performed behind her. The performance culminated with the performers forming a line and moving from the back to the front of the stage whilst executing high kicks until the segment ended.

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[91] Possibly because it is difficult to hide long hair, as respondent Kerryn Davey (2006e) has commented.
[92] He also wore dungarees but was topless. His purpose on the company's website is described as being "the beef", or object of sexual interest.

This performance set the pace for the overall theme of the evening – that of incongruity. The segment is broadly comic as a result of the juxtaposition of the contrasting action and dialogue, exaggeration, and the subversive outcome. This is an example of what Babcock refers to as "symbolic inversion": "any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political" (quoted in McNeal 1999 348). The narrator's knowledge of, and participation in, the illicit activities is clear evidence they are condoned, and are indeed a frequent occurrence, suggesting that the house is a brothel. At first glance, there appeared to be evidence suggesting that the show was misogynistic and aimed to ridicule the 'women' represented as the performers' costumes indicated their deviation from socially accepted standards of femininity and normality.

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the alluring negligee worn by a rotund drag queen wearing a novelty short, black wig, and the exaggerated height of the rest of the performers' beehive wigs, appeared to suggest that femininity was being deconstructed and the concept 'woman' was being ridiculed as unnatural, rather than being presented as a neutral construct (Butler 1993). However, particularly in the latter case, the comedy derives from the visual exaggeration of a currently unfashionable hair style at odds with the norm. The comedy is an ironic comment using fashions as a manifestation of the notion that a woman's social role should be based upon her submission in a patriarchal society, literally as maids or as decorative sexual partners. However, this notional social role was evidently considered illegitimate by the female audience, who laughed, cheered and clapped in recognition of the obvious celebration demonstrated by the group, who were shown to be

able to subvert their circumstances for their own pleasure. These 'women' presented on stage were not subservient to men, but dressed provocatively to gain their own sexual pleasure and earn financial independence.

Maurice Charney has commented that "…comic action is developed by repetition, accumulation, and snowballing", (Charney 1980 82) which was clearly the case here. The case for this perspective becomes clearer as the piece progresses and the 'women' control the male dancers and finish the performance with their jubilant can-can, their domination shown by a drag queen using balloons to imitate male genitalia. Interestingly, the female audience cheered. Indeed, the performance directly undermined notions that 'proper' women are those considered the most 'feminine', instead suggesting those able to use the culture to their advantage. The female dancers performed the same dramatic function as the drag performers, indicating the uniting factor of the shared cultural experience of women, regardless of appearance. The maid's dress, in stark contrast, was a traditional depiction of female servitude due to her acceptance of a semi-subjugated role. Alternatively, the utilisation of the male dancer, whose apparent enjoyment of erotic subjugation underpinned the drag performance, suggested feminine dominance was cause for celebration by male and female partners alike. To a heterosexual audience who may be unfamiliar with other forms of sexual relationships, such as those illustrated graphically by @D2, the comic exaggeration functions as the first lesson on how these traditional sex roles can be overcome and, indeed, subverted to the benefit of both parties.

The performance exemplifies a comic model of empowerment, which has been described by Charney as: "…a way of mastering a fearful, uncertain and mysterious reality [where] we may play at roles and positions for some temporary advantages and without being fully

committed to them" (Charney 1980 157). Performed to an audience who are likely to include brides-to-be, the performance is a hyperbolic exemplification of how women can assume authority within marriage whilst also granting the sexual privileges to which patriarchal society has arguably become accustomed. The women may live the role vicariously through the drag queens, thus ensuring their participation in the audience represents:

> … a play element. [As the audience] are kidding around [and] serious at one and the same time, and the exact proportions of each [baffle the audience, who] may not really discern the strength of [their] own motives until [they] test the reactions of others. They may either inspire us to go on or dampen our enthusiasm. (Charney 1980 158)

"The reactions of others" (Ibid) in this case may be that of male partners. It must be remembered that unlike informal cohabitation, marriage and civil partnerships involve a change of status, a formalisation of the union that traditionally results in the bride adopting the groom's surname and, thus, becoming joined to his family, and in connotation at least, discarding her former name, familial structure and identity.

For the modern, largely heterosexual audience, this can result in a basic battle of wills for the appearance of dominance. Charney goes on to comment that "if we admit that aggression is a powerful component in many jokes, we still need to define the exact status of that aggression" (Charney 1980 157). The aggression forms at the convergence between traditional notions of marriage in which women are seen as compliant, and contemporary perspectives that hold both parties as equals, regardless of who actually 'wears the trousers'. Unfortunately, the performance does not provide a solution for this final conundrum, focusing instead on the benefits of the feminist model in which women take

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charge of the satisfaction of both partners. Due to the presentational style, this obliquely feminist message does not significantly alienate male members of the audience, ensuring the continual attention of all. It is a message appropriately in tune for the first act of a drag performance in a predominantly heterosexual venue.

The second performance was a rendition of the burlesque song "You Gotta Have a Gimmick", from *Gypsy: A Musical Fable* (Styne, Sondheim and Laurents 1959).[93] The first drag performer, in the role of Tessie Tura, entered wearing a natural-looking blonde wig and a blue dress constructed from light-weight, floating material.[94] It had extensions connected to poles that ran along her arms that she manipulated to suggest wings. Furthermore, it complemented her slow, delicate, movements and made her appear graceful. She began by miming the song's quasi-academic introduction to the art of stripping. Her gimmick was revealed to be the wings on the costume and her ability to high kick. The second performer, in the Miss Mazeppa role, wore a costume based on that of a

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[93] The song's solo segments were performed in a different order to that of the original musical film. The score used by the venue was that of the 1963 film directed by LeRoy. It would be easy to level accusations of misogyny at the original piece, which depicts the shy, young Gypsy meeting strippers who give her tips on how to perform. While attractive, the visual contrast between themselves and the younger, more natural looking Gypsy would appear to make them unlikely strippers. Furthermore, their well-pitched, but unsustained singing voices, and, in the case of Miss Mazeppa, inability to produce a constant note on the trumpet, suggest a comic routine stemming from and reflecting, desperation, rather than an erotic striptease that revels in its ability to incite laughter through ironic self-depreciation borne out of the realisation that the gimmick is substituted in the place of genuine allure. They have neither excessive beauty nor skill and have to resort to gimmicks to add interest to their bodies, which are constantly on display through their costumes. This suggests that "to be a star", women must find methods of demonstrating their ability to fulfil accepted notions of femininity as a talent in itself, particularly grace (indicated by one costume's wings), beauty and suggested sexual availability (indicated by the lights that draw attention to the shapeliness of the physical form), and sexual availability (suggested by the trombone prop). In contrast, Gypsy is initially averse to the notion of stripping itself, presumably believing it to be immoral, and, therefore, her eventual gimmick becomes one of trickery – using parts of her costume or the stage dressing to hide her body while she removes her clothes. Her trickery enables her to shield her modesty whilst also providing titillation by stimulating her audience's imagination of what her body may be like, as did the real Gypsy Rose Lee, on whom the musical is based (npg.). While Gypsy uses her intelligence to carve a successful career without contravening her morals, she and the other strippers are nevertheless only seen as able to succeed by appealing to the men in the audience, whether this is by erotic stimulation, in the case of Gypsy, or bawdy comedy that directly and somewhat crudely suggests their sexual availability, in the case of the other three characters.

[94] The costumes used for The Birdcage's performance were similar to those used in the 1993, made-for-television, production of the musical that was directed by Ardolino.

Roman centurion. A rather aggressive version of 'femininity' was emphasised by cones covering the breast area. She wore the same black wig as in the previous performance, and her physique was comically highlighted by the centurion's skirt, which sat just underneath her stomach, and by a criss-crossed leather belt that outlined her girth. Her gimmick was a trumpet, which was highlighted by a dance in which she timed pelvic thrusts and lowered the instrument to coincide with the drumbeats in the music.[95] The final performer, as Electra, wore a skin-coloured body-stocking with blue stars covering her breasts, genitals, and buttocks. In addition, she wore a fluffy, blue back-piece resembling curved wings. Her gimmick, as is traditional, was revealed as the stage lights were dimmed and the stars she wore were shown to be lights. After the individual segments, the performers paraded around in a circle before the number ended.

"You Gotta Have a Gimmick" (Styne, Sondheim and Laurents 1959) gains different connotations when performed as part of a drag cabaret over thirty years after the original was filmed. It is now focused less on the mechanics of submission and more on the individual's potential to change their circumstances to achieve their goals. In the twenty-first century, women earning a living by exposing their bodies are no longer viewed solely as submissive ornaments of male patriarchy. Celebrities such as glamour model Jordon and television presenter Abi Titmuss (who came to public attention following a sex scandal), are now publicly acknowledged as capable business women who have mentally, and in some cases physically, developed their assets to enter, and manage, their chosen career.[96] Importantly, like the strippers in "You Gotta Have a Gimmick", these women are not

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[95] A rather crude interpretation of this action may be a comparison of the flare, or bell, of the trumpet to the vagina, suggesting that musical dexterity, like the sexual relations implied by the thrusting action, becomes a method of self-fulfilment.

[96] Indeed, in a centenary survey conducted by the Girl Guides Association, *Girlguiding UK* (npg.), suggested Abi Titmuss was the "greatest influence" on young women.

considered to have outstanding beauty or performative talent, but have instead capitalised on gimmicks to make themselves famous. While these gimmicks relate to different aspects of hetero-normative sexuality, these women are, nevertheless, perceived as being fully aware of these perceptions and in control of their bodies. They are altering themselves to manipulate heterosexual male desire to assimilate themselves into the public consciousness, develop a marketing brand and, thus, ensure the success of their other endeavours.

In addition to these women's use of gimmicks being similar to that of the comic and slightly downbeat characters in *Gypsy: A Musical Fable* (Styne, Sondheim and Laurents 1959), the rise of so-called reality television has changed the nature of celebrity dramatically. It is now unnecessary to have particular talent or business acumen, as the exposure offered to the public by reality television programmes, such as documentaries and talent contests, ensures they often gain short-term fame.[97] Celebrity career longevity, however, is maintained by sustaining the public's continual interest in what is, nevertheless, the reproduction of a gimmick through an appropriate milieu. The success and comedy of The Birdcage's routine, therefore, lies in the audience's recognition of the lyric's significance in this modern context, and the performers' inventiveness in displaying the gimmicks. The performers are, after all, males who have found a market in which to earn money by performing in drag as a specialist product.[98]

Moreover, the performance demonstrates how 'ordinary' (yet liberating) this gimmick can be, once the performance platform is established. While the original version of the song

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[97] Indeed, participation in the reality television documentary, *Essex Wives* (2002), was glamour model Jodie Marsh's platform to a media career. The Girl Guides Association (npg.) survey indicated that 48% of 10 to 15 year olds would like to appear on reality television.
[98] Respondent Ball (2006) stated that part of the attraction of drag performance was the financial rewards available.

upholds the notion that highly developed physical and mental attributes are necessary in order for the bearer to be classed as a woman, the drag queens' performance succeeds by simultaneously achieving and deconstructing both its connotations and denotations. The male performers masquerade as, and at times are successful enough to be mistaken for, females as a result of the show. However, their focus on the accentuated display of mechanisms connoting sexuality indicates what Butler considers to be the denaturalisation of the concept itself (1993), which The Birdcage's performers draw attention to by contrasting the gimmick with the audience's knowledge of their male physicality.[99] If femininity is considered to be the display of attributes connoting femaleness, then the focus on gimmicks intended to emphasise feminine display through the musical disruption and pelvis thrusts in the segment makes this apparent femininity appear an unnatural, hyperbolic and illusory construct in this context.

Charney has defined burlesque as "a damaging take off of one's work or manner," – a form of deconstruction (Charney 1980 15). But the performers' actions should not be seen as "damaging" (Ibid). This indicates a process of negation that suggests no redeeming features other than the instigation of mocking laughter. However, the drag queens are not performing in order to titillate an audience, but as a method of highlighting and, thus, dispensing with the notion that their physical attractiveness is the main subject of import – this cannot be the case as their accentuated appearances are highly varied in contrast to social perceptions of beauty. As a result of this subversion, they are able to earn money for their skills in comedy and dance, transforming not only their product, but the context in which it is provided. They are in control and are being paid and watched as skilled

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[99] This does not automatically mean that they are lampooning the women playing the roles in the films, because to do so requires the majority of the audience to be aware of these other versions of the show in order for the three to be comparable and, therefore, to enable the humour to make sense.

entertainers, akin to theatre professionals, rather than as people who simply happen to look attractive or alluring.

Nevertheless, as in the filmed performances, the characters' talents are displayed in a limited fashion – kicks are high, but not impressively high.[100] Their self-confidence allows them to manipulate the audience to encourage empathetic identification and the perception that they are proud of their abilities, but are willing to "find joy" in situations where their display is lacking and use it to their advantage (Rider Robinson 1999 37). They are, thus, able to reference their developing, comradely relationship with the audience and "seek complicity" (Ibid 41). As a result, the segment forms a direct contrast to the depiction of idealised womanhood presented in the previous performance. It allows the performers to vacillate between being understood as male and female (McNeal 1999) to depict common concerns that relate directly to the self-perceptions and aspirations of the 'ordinary' people in the audience. This suggests that audacity, rather than perfection, is more likely to be a pre-requisite for success.

In contrast, the third cabaret act presented the audience with an alternative conceptualisation of drag performance. The projector screen was again rolled down in front of the stage area, displaying a large, jewelled, silver crucifix which slowly rotated sideways against a dark background. Miss Orry entered wearing a black cassock and realistic, long, blonde, wig – while another performer, also wearing a cassock, crossed the stage and placed a crucifix around Miss Orry neck.[101] The other performer then left the stage area

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[100] The performers at The Birdcage are trained in a variety of theatrical disciplines and underplay these talents (Rayne 2006c).
[101] Miss Orry, complete in a wig reminiscent of Madonna's hair, gave a convincing impression of the singer's performance style, suggesting Butler's theories of gender-crossing are more to do with the utilisation of

while Miss Orry kissed the crucifix, before standing still to a mime the first verse of Madonna's song, "Like a Prayer" (1989). The projector screen departed to reveal the other performers, and the company began an energetic dance routine. The dancing was heavily choreographed to involve relatively complicated steps that the named dancers and the drag performers alike performed as a trained dance troupe, achieving the same stances and maintaining the rhythm to indicate that the performance was intended as a serious rather than comic piece. It elevated the show from the common perception of cross-dressed performance as rather crude entertainment, to that of a diverse and malleable genre unafraid of utilising self-consciously controversial material. The performance was, thus, much more dramatic than the previous numbers and demanded the audience's attention by defying the concept of drag as a purely satirical art form, as the expectation that the performers would remove the cassocks to reveal disco clothes was confounded.

The audience's enjoyment of the piece appeared to be based on their recognition of its astute reproduction of the subversive message from the song's promotional video (npg.). Miss Orry gave a realistic impersonation of Madonna, referencing the singer's sexual gimmicks by recreating a section using a simulated orgasm as a physical demonstration of ecstatic dance and, thus, spiritual evolution. The contrast with the performance's opening reinforced the cultural importance of the singer whose evolving public persona has ensured continued fame that has facilitated songs that have frequently provoked debate on the relationship between sexuality, religion and racism (McClary 1991). The performance, thus, developed the previous act's message that gimmicks could gain the public's attention

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culturally accepted signifiers than one's biology, a primary focus of much performance art within the LGBTQ community (Butler 1993).

to ensure success by demonstrating, through the audiences' knowledge of the video, that they could also be used to create a lasting cultural impact.

The final performance, of Tina Turner's song, "River Deep – Mountain High", (1966) continued in a similar vein, with Miss Orry again providing an astute impression not only of Turner's movements, but also of her character. She was supported by the two female dancers miming as backing-singers at the front of the stage, and the rest of the performers dancing at the back. So convincing was Miss Orry's performance that the eventual removal of her wig (to reveal her short, masculine hairstyle) and concurrent display of disco-style dancing (at odds with the tempo of the piece) across the stage at the song's conclusion, separated her persona from that of Turner and acted as the demonstration of the possibilities for personal development offered by performance.

As The Birdcage is a mainstream, heterosexually-orientated establishment that caters for a celebratory, female market, each performance aimed to provide entertainment that would be actively enjoyed by the venue's audience to ensure its continued popularity. The artists are, thus, limited in what they can perform, and it is understandable that any apparent subtexts are somewhat obscured by broad comedy or replications of popular songs. Nevertheless, these conclusions are based on the audience's reactions at specific points in the performance, most often either laughing or watching in a rapt, yet respectful silence in response to the facets outlined above.[102] The most striking aspect of the different cabaret sets was the extent to which the performers' appearances and actions connoted subtexts that

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[102] During site-based research, it was impossible to conclusively gauge the audience's reaction to the performance, and what messages, if any, they perceived within it. It would be inappropriate to ask them their views on drag as, as not only was the music very loud, but as the night progressed so did the amount of alcohol consumed. The customers would be unable to give informed consent to participate in the study, partly as it would not be possible to explain to them their rights as respondents.

related to the concept of gender perception relevant to the female clientele. Though perhaps vastly reactionary in contrast with other artists discussed in this thesis, the appearance of male drag performers (alongside males appearing as males and females appearing as both females and drag queens) had the effect of denaturalising the concept of traditional gender roles and their associated cultural expectations.[103] The acts then took the audience on a trajectory that utilised bawdy comedy, firstly, to demonstrate the possibilities offered by female empowerment within relationships, and secondly, the conscious utilisation of cultural expectations of sex roles as a means to facilitate personal success.

After these comic performances, 'serious' female impersonation in "Like a Prayer" (Madonna 1989) offered a presentation whose reference to a popular song demonstrated how the utilisation and subversion of cultural expectations can engender cultural change by generating debate on controversial themes. The final act demonstrated the art of female impersonation as believable mimicry in order to highlight the performativity at its heart, and, therefore, the potential for the subversion of cultural expectations resultant from the performance of sex roles. Each performance, however, contained subtexts relating to the themes of sexuality and personal empowerment that this chapter will continue to demonstrate are a major facet of much contemporary drag performance.

The cabaret staged at The Birdcage demonstrates that the use of drag artists as the venue's selling point does not necessarily entail the presentation of dramatic dialogue concerning homosexuality, or indeed, the concept of fluid gender identity. The chapter has argued that in The Birdcage (as sample representative of similar venues) this results from focusing the

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[103] The venue's (then) manager stated he required further drag performers for the venue, which may be why the female dancers are used in dual roles. It is noticeable that despite the venue's continual catering for Hen Night parties, the role of the Drag Hostess desisted for a time whilst a replacement for Ball was found.

performance on the interests and sensibilities of a predominantly heterosexual client group, and, thus, limits connotations to covert ideologies of personal empowerment within a heterosexual framework. Conversely, one may hypothesise that the dramatic evocation of Queer discourse may proliferate at venues where a significant percentage of the audience identifies as LGBTQ. According to this hypothesis, the performance may represent the demonstration of empirical evidence incorporated into Queer Theory, ratifying the social and personal aspects of the assembled community, as was suggested by the scenarios detailed in Kirk and Heath (1984). Such a hypothesis is, however, a generalisation based on an incompatible secondary analysis. This incompatibility results partially from the lack of data with which to validate the findings in line with sociological good-practice, defined by Sarah Arber as "criteria of reliability, validity, and representativeness" (Arber 2005 270), and partially as a result of time variables. At the time this thesis was researched, around forty years had passed since The Stonewall Riot, and around twenty years since Kirk and Health's documentation of the emergence of a self-aware, politicised, modern drag performance community. Reports produced by self-identified LGBTQ journalists asserting that equality and the social acceptance of non hetero-normative identity has been achieved are now commonplace, even in traditionally conservative media.[104] The result is the contention that the very aspects of identity of which mainstream society had been made aware by communities considered at the time to represent alternative genders are now incorporated into the perception of the mainstream itself. This would suggest that performance investigating these previously 'alternative' identities could either proliferate, having become a mainstream concern and, therefore, more readily accessible by those who identify as LGBTQ, or could cease to exist as a result of the lack of political expediency.

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[104] Such as former Conservative MP Matthew Parris' article, "Finally, I've decided to take the plunge. I'm coming out..." (2007 17).

Utilising the sample variable of public houses owned and frequented primarily by LGBTQ people, specifically @D2 (in Nottingham) and The New Penny (in Leeds), this analysis will now reference original field research, artist interviews, and the entertainment provided to demonstrate that the understanding of variant sexual identities continues to be a topic of performance, just as it was during the Kirk and Heath (1984) survey. The contemporary variation to this theme is the evolution of a more relaxed approach that reaffirms the community through mutual empowerment and the enjoyment of their traditional arts, and which takes precedence over the performances' political implications.

@D2 and The New Penny differ in comparison to The Birdcage, firstly in terms of their location. Both are situated towards the edge of their respective city centres, ensuring that attendees are likely to have prior knowledge of their function. In addition, both venues are situated within the areas established as the city's 'Gay Villages', which contain other LGBTQ-owned or orientated establishments, and can, thus, anticipate that a significant percentage of the clientele are likely to identify as LGBTQ and will be aware that they will be accepted into the social community. There are, however, some differences between the two geographical settings that possibly influence the entertainment they offer.

In Leeds, The New Penny is situated at the end of New Briggate, a street leading away from the city centre. Half way down this street, many venues cater for audiences with specific sexual interests: there is a heterosexual-female erotic-dance venue; two LGBTQ-owned and orientated public houses, both of which attract a primarily male clientele; the LGBTQ-orientated erotic supplies vendor, Clone Zone; and the non-sexuality specific erotic supplies vendor, Simply Pleasure. Several of these venues are situated under a

viaduct, which may discourage new clientele who do not know the area. The New Penny is located past the viaduct and only metres away from another LGBTQ-orientated public house (The Bridge) that also offers drag entertainment. During the field research, it became apparent from the clientele's conversations with the door staff that they moved between both venues throughout the evening in order to locate peers.[105] As the neighbouring venues have differing internal and external appearances, one may assume audience interchange is a result of transferring peer groups desiring these differing surroundings, complete with the various drag queen DJs.

In contrast, @D2 is situated in a sparsely frequented industrial area of Nottingham. The surrounding landscape is easily visible, and, therefore, appears slightly safer than that of the Leeds venues. The venue is situated next to an LGBTQ-orientated night club which also presents a drag queen DJ one night per week, although it opens and closes later than @D2, which minimises market competition.[106] @D2's frontage features a rainbow banner alongside the venue's name on the architrave, indicating its client orientation, while The New Penny simply displays its name on the architrave in red lettering set against a cream-coloured background. While both venues are officially classed as 'mixed', as they admit clients of all sexualities, there are, nevertheless, some signs that they cater for the previously secretive LGBTQ community; both frontages incorporate expansive windows that have been covered, or blacked-out, preventing outsiders from seeing into the

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[105] The need to move between venues may result from the constraints of space; certainly by 10pm, The New Penny's dance floor was crowded, and a 'one in, one out' admission policy is routinely enforced to prevent overcrowding.

[106] @D2 has a reputation as a pre-club 'warm-up venue' where clientele go to drink and socialise before going to the night club, NG1. Several of the performers at @D2 moved next door to attend the night club when they have finished their act.

establishment.[107] In turn, this may have the effect of making them appear somewhat exclusive to the casual passer-by.

These venues cater primarily for the LGBTQ community and could be described as semi-politicised. This is evident from their internal décor and the use of space, which influences client interaction. In @D2, the interior is split into five distinct sections. To the right of the main entrance is the darkened dancing area, lit by 'disco' effects, including pictures and text projected along the back wall. It is a relatively small space, measuring around ten metres square, and is further constrained by a number of chairs and tables positioned along the outer walls. The small DJ booth is situated in the corner of the main dancing area, adjoining the bar along the continuing back wall. Placed on floor level, as opposed to the standard, raised platform, its close proximity to the dance floor facilitates conversation between the clientele and the drag queen DJ. This gives the venue an intimate, friendly atmosphere. In front of the bar, the venue is divided by a waist-height, wooden wall which, on one side, has five chairs and a resting shelf, and an area containing low and comfortably padded seating on the other side. Underneath this is the entrance to a well-lit corridor. On the right-hand wall is a rack containing LGBTQ-related information leaflets, while another spacious and comfortable seating area is on the left.[108] The areas are well-lit and subtly decorated in light tones. When it was visited, the atmosphere was overwhelmingly comfortable and inviting; this layout suggests that the venue aims to provide spaces for relaxation and conversation and, therefore, also caters for the more holistic needs of its community, such as information sessions hosted by sexual health body, MESMAC.

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[107] The New Penny has claims to being the longest running LGBTQ public house outside of London, and, thus, was developed at a time when the illegality of homosexuality ensured privacy was a paramount concern.

[108] Five metres further on was the unisex entrance to the toilets, which included hand-washing basins, mirrors, and three cubicles. The users' gender was indicated by male and female symbols (which the researcher found slightly excluding on the basis that they rely on the visitor remembering the 'appropriate' symbol).

In contrast to @D2, immediately beyond The New Penny's entrance are the bar and a passage leading into a less well-lit area beyond. There is an air of privacy in this venue; clients appear to interact largely in peer groups. Along the outer walls are a number of high, plastic stools and a resting shelf. To the left of the bar, in front of the stools is the dancing area (which is similar in size to that of @D2) and to the right of this is a platform, raised around a foot and a half above the ground, which comprises of the DJ booth and a small amount of platform that is not continuously utilised. While this stage area is open to the audience, it is difficult to access as a result of its height. This results in the drag queen; unlike those of @D2, also being placed at a distance from the audience – making direct contact difficult, as well as slightly intimidating, as establishing contact necessarily involves mounting the stage and being in view of the crowd.

The way in which the staff used the different venues to interact with the clients increases this apparent socio-political bias.[109] At The New Penny, the clientele have no direct communication with staff other than the drag queen bar tenders (again, suggesting a homosexual venue) and the security staff at the door.[110] This creates a sense of a closed community, not unlike any other establishment that is frequented by regular attendees, and which can be rather uninviting to newcomers. The lack of additional staff may result from financial constraints, but the effect remains the same: the suggestion of a desire to maintain a client group who use the venue because of its clientele, rather than as an entertainment

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[109] When conducting field research at @D2, the researcher was given a tour of the venue by respondent Davey. She returned periodically to the researcher thereafter, and as a result the researcher seemed to be accepted by the clientele. In contrast, as Anna Glypta, the drag queen respondent at The New Penny, was working throughout the duration of the research, she could not spend a lot of time with the researcher. As a result, the researcher appeared to be considered, quite naturally, an outsider, and was frequently watched by other patrons. So as not to disrupt the venue, the researcher therefore refrained from a full-scale investigation of the premises.

[110] This is in contrast to the non-drag bar tenders of The Birdcage, who are dressed in company uniform.

outlet in its own right.[111] On the other hand, @D2 employs three additional drag artists (at the time of writing, two drag queens and a female 'bio queen') whose role is similar to that of The Birdcage's Drag Hostess: when not performing as part of the cabaret, they mingle with the clientele and welcome people at the door, encourage socialising and point out the facilities.[112] It was particularly noticeable that while the majority of their time was spent encouraging the audience to use the dance floor, they also moved around the venue making an obvious effort to put people at their ease, to the extent of viewing one client's holiday photographs. It made the atmosphere profoundly friendly, particularly as they altered the performed level of their drag personas to suit different individuals, and moved away if their presence was not apparently required. It was also made clear that while this is a venue catering predominantly for the LGBTQ community, it is also evidently more than welcoming to heterosexuals, whom respondent Davey indicated to be a relatively small but regular component of the clientele.[113]

Again, the entertainment provided varies greatly between the two venues. In the case of The New Penny, it appeared to be a reflection of the drag queen's suppositions of the audience's concerns, and as a result it changed dramatically throughout the evening. When the researcher arrived at the venue at 8pm, there were around ten males dotted around the venue, wearing casual attire, drinking on their own and playing on the fruit machines, but the largest audience concentration was a group of women on the dance floor. Their physical appearance was dissimilar to that of the women who were heard discussing their lesbian sexuality later in the evening and they appeared to be heterosexual, and possibly visiting

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[111] The New Penny is the named location for Leeds' post-Pride carnival celebrations.

[112] Some of the bar staff wear gender-normative clothes while others wear drag as they also perform in the cabaret.

[113] In contrast, particularly in the latter part of the evening, The New Penny does not appear to have a regular heterosexual clientele; heterosexuals generally attend as the guests of LGBTQ friends, rather than as couples, as in @D2.

The New Penny as it offered entertainment early in the evening. Anna Glypta, the drag queen DJ welcomed them, accommodated their music requests, and attempted to engage them in banter over the loud music.[114] To their apparent delight, much of her commentary rotated around establishing their identities and plans for the evening, which included some jovial references to the benefits of following safe-sex practices. She continued to play the same disco music, but combined it with banter regarding her costume, a nun's habit. She utilised the costume as a prop, periodically removing the head-dress and placing it around her leg, in an apparent satire of orthodox religion, using it to 'crown' the importance of the lower bodily strata, and, thus, sexuality, as opposed to piety and chastity associated with the morality and the head.[115]

By the time the women left the venue, at around 9.30pm, the client group had begun to change radically. Far more people were present, the vast visible majority being male, and a large percentage presented in a manner reflecting the conventions of LGBTQ culture (as identified by @D2 respondent Rose), namely acting in a 'camp' style and wearing figure-hugging clothing (Rose 2006). This suggested the personal and political expression of their identities. At this point, the conscious performance of identity became far more apparent.

Around this time, the venue's entertainment changed. Several same-sex couples jumped on to the stage to dance, one couple at a time. These dances signified a ritualised performance of the communal acceptance and celebration of homosexuality. In the instance of the three sets of male dancers, there were five distinct sections of action. In the first, they would

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[114] Anna Glypta, also known as Marcus Rayne, is in his late twenties. He is from Southampton but has performed in drag in Leeds and beyond for several years in a number of venues and has featured on television.
[115] Although the concept of the wimple as a religious garment seems to be based on a fashionable rather than theological basis.

mount the stage and visually ratify their appearance and, thus, their identity as homosexual 'regulars' by greeting the drag queen, as the M.C. and figurehead of the community.[116]

The second section consisted of a 'performance' of their culture through hyperbolic disco dancing. They faced each other, yet did not touch – indicating that participation in the LGBTQ entertainment circuit was a frequently used method of meeting other community members. Anna Glypta made comments such as "ooh, look at him go!" in encouragement, and the crowd would cheer or wave.

The third section reflected four distinct levels of meaning, from the public to the private. The customers dancing on the stage would move to face the crowd, one behind the other, and move up and down each other's bodies, moving their hands along the outline of their figure (without quite touching). The couples focused intently on each other's bodies, apparently oblivious to the crowd, who ceased cheering and instead returned low "oohs", indicating their understanding of the erotic implications. While this display was a performance to the crowd, it also had a practical application, as the dancers appeared to be testing the strength of their attractions to each other.

Having apparently enjoyed the experience and, thus, reaffirmed their mutual attraction, they bent forward in the fourth section in a vague and triumphant simulation of intercourse, which was greeted by cheers and laughter from the audience. Finally, they stood apart, smiling at each other before exiting the stage.

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[116] McNeal (1999) has commented that the use of drag queens in this context may be as a mirror of gay identity itself, as a mixture of culturally accepted notions of male and female.

When women entered the stage, the display was far shorter, although it comprised four apparent sections. Again, they would greet the drag queen DJ briefly before a second section of dancing individually for a longer period. They would then touch each other, often with a mouth-to-mouth kiss, before the fourth section, which involved gazing into each other's eyes prior to exiting the stage.

These performances indicated a difference between the stereotypical development of gay and lesbian relationships, with the lesbian couples emphasising emotional intimacy, connoted through the longer dancing period and lack of focus on sexual action in comparison to the men. Both sets of performance were, however, celebrations of the community precisely because they were performed in front of, and thus for, its members. Anna Glypta's role in this performance appeared to be to encourage this group expression, and she would often comment to buoy the dancers with references to their sexuality or appearance, and would encourage the crowd's vocal affirmation of the homosexuality displayed.[117]

In contrast, two different types of entertainment are available at @D2. Up until 10pm, drag queen CherAround acts as a DJ.[118] She takes music requests and engages the clientele in banter which is frequently of a comic, sexual nature – often commenting quasi-derogatively on their clothing as an indication of their sexual intent. She also highlights the activities of the drag hostesses, comically admonishing them for their behaviour which includes exaggerated playful flirtation with each other and willing clients. The main entertainment is

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[117] Perhaps as a result of the primary clientele being homosexual, the performance witnessed during the ethnography directly affirmed that particular sexuality. As a result, there appeared to be little liminal play or experimentation with different relationship models. Anna Glypta has stated in interview that she has engaged personally in liminal performance, and did so with the express purpose of gender development, dancing intimately with a lesbian from a butch, leather subculture.

[118] CherAround, or Marcus Maddison, is in his mid-thirties. He attended the Guildhall School of Drama.

a series of cabarets performed by the staff throughout the evening.[119] The performances reflect and celebrate the venue's primary clientele in the same manner as The New Penny, but with one vital difference: the set is planned in advance to contain a repertoire of different styles. Respondent Davey has confirmed these are designed to appeal to a range of different clients and to satisfy a range of aesthetic and political tastes.[120] Unlike the other performances detailed in this chapter, @D2's cabarets do not appear to develop a message that progresses through the evening. Rather, as was demonstrated during respondent interviews, they directly reflect the aims and views of the individual performers.[121] As a result, they will be analysed in this context.

As @D2 is a mixed-sexuality venue catering for a variety of age groups, the performances reflect LGBTQ concerns, but through heavily popularist material that enables them to appeal to the majority of the audience. The first performance was a rendition of "A Whole New World", the theme song to the animated film, *Aladdin* (Menken and Rice 1992). The presentation was a satire on the original, with Maddison's CherAround donning a different costume to play the princess to drag hostess Claudia Shirtlifter's Aladdin. In contrast to the song's original context as a love ballad, it was performed as a rampant seduction, culminating in simulated sexual intercourse. The audience clapped and laughed through its duration, particularly at the end – likely in appreciation of its use of drag to reposition the relationship to reflect an LGBTQ perspective. It is this type of performance that enables

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[119] These cabarets are typically performed either as solos or duets, although the entire troupe participates in a lavish demonstration on special occasions such as Bank Holidays.

[120] Kerryn Davey (drag persona Mingeeta Lickolotopus) is in her mid-twenties and, while originally from London, grew up in Boston, Lincolnshire. She is from a largely middle-class background and began dance and musical training as a young child.

[121] The songs are chosen by the individual performers. They are then agreed with Maddison as the leader of the troupe, based on whether he feels the individuals have the technical ability to perform the piece, and whether the financial and other resources are available. For example, as Davey states (2006c), it is often inadvisable for a new performer to attempt a piece involving large quantities of lyrics, as poor timing can lead to the performances losing pace with the rhythm.

drag to remain accessible to a younger generation used to mainstream media, whilst also preventing performances from becoming dated.

This theme was also explored through "Hermaphrodite" (Lynch 2000), which caters directly for sections of the clientele by referencing relationship dilemmas and sexuality concepts familiar to the LGBTQ audience. It is a love song of sorts, in which a man (portrayed in drag by Davey) discusses his relationship with a hermaphrodite who presents as a femme fatale, and who is portrayed by the Claudia Shirtlifter character (respondent Rose).[122] In the song, the narrator discusses how his partner differs behaviourally and biologically from that which is culturally expected of 'women'. The song represents his attempts to understand and defend their relationship. The social pressures suggested in the narrative recollect a comment by Maurice Charney on the nature of dramatic love:

> True love must be difficult in order to be worthy of its practitioners […] So the playwright sets about blearing the eyes of the lovers and putting booby traps in their path. Complex erotic psychology is simplified in order to work out the set equations, and the doctrine of love at first sight proves to be extremely useful to the dramatist to get the plot underway. It's hard to believe that anyone seriously credited this notion as an account of human behaviour, but it's of course sex rather than love that the comic dramatist is talking about. (Charney 1980 79-80)

As Charney's theory correctly asserts, the protagonist's underlying concern is the consummation of the relationship, and the song's title "Hermaphrodite" (Lynch 2000) indicates that the comic "booby trap" (Charney 1980 79-80) is the obstacle that bars sexual intercourse from being completed. The narrator's observations enable him to appreciate Hermaphrodite's differences to the social norm in order to accept the relationship by

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[122] Tony Rose (Claudia Shirtlifter / Shit-Stabber) is in his early twenties. He is from a middle-class background. He was planning to resign his position as a regular performer at the venue at the request of his substantive employers, an information technology company.

viewing them instead as eccentricities of her character that add interest and an empathetic understanding between the pair. This must be completed in order for a sexual relationship to be enjoyed without qualms. As the song ends, their performance establishes that the acceptance of this difference results in pleasure, as Hermaphrodite 'anally penetrates' the narrator via simulation, much to his apparent appreciation.[123] Thus, as Charney states: "[once] the audience faces up to the sensual nature of most love comedy, it can better appreciate the obstacles that are introduced to make the rewards more delicious" (Charney 1980 80). As a result, the performance suggests that LGBTQ identities can achieve a pleasure principle, which develops from the conceptualisation of the social fulfilment of the self (espoused by the feminism of The Birdcage) to self-definition governed by the mutual acceptance of difference, rather than conformity with accepted codes of sexuality, be they heterosexual or otherwise.

Possibly to provide a contrast to the performances previously described, and lessen the risk of alienating some sections of the audience, Robbie Williams' popular song, "Millennium", (Williams 1999) was parodied to comically admonish the singer's supposed arrogance. Respondent Rose, dressed as an older version of Williams complete with paunch, made disparaging comments chiding the singer for self-obsession. While the performance is obviously didactic, it also provided a more subtle message that paradoxically both contested and encouraged the visibility of LGBTQ sexual politics. This resulted from Davey's drag presentation as the young, cocksure Williams. In this guise, she presents a typical drag-king performance, a hyperbolised and comic version of masculinity, in which she transforms her body and wears clothing enabling her to approximate Williams'

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[123] As a result of Hermaphrodite's name, a pun on 'hermaphrodite', it could also be assumed that both partners can enjoy the other's sexual penetration, as both have a penis and an orifice. As a result, the relationship can be considered to have the potential to be truly equal.

persona.[124] As a result of her performance, she demonstrates and, thus, promotes the contestation of socially prescribed gender attributes.

Drag kinging is an art form associated primarily with lesbianism, and Davey's ability to perform as such forms the core paradox of her message to the audience. For while there is anecdotal evidence of the resistance of social categorisation amongst the LGBTQ community (Sinfield 1998),[125] the reduction in homosexuality's status as a taboo is relatively recent; part of the politics of modern LGBTQ identities is the sexualities' regulation. While LGBTQ identity suggests a liminal practice of sexuality that differs from the heterosexual norm, this very liminality is constricted by the expected development and display of the new identity to enable its categorisation according to its social circumstances, effects and appearance.[126] These 'other' identities and subsequent identifiers become the norm themselves, and their commercialisation enables easy assimilation into the culture through the purchase of their iconography (such as the appropriate hairstyle, clothing and literature) in the hope of earning acceptance.

To refuse to assimilate is to challenge the established politics of identity. As stated in Chapter One of this thesis, Davey was working as the venue's barmaid when her sexual orientation was publicly contested by a customer due to her lack of conformity to an anticipated stereotype. As @D2 is an establishment involved in LGBTQ community work, its liminality is enabled through the supposed potential offered by this identity.

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[124] Close resemblance is difficult to achieve as a result of her thick, long hair, which is impossible to place in a wig.
[125] However, survey respondents are automatically intellectualised as they are propelled into a role in which there is pressure to appear either knowledgeable or to display logical ability through which to understand sociological concepts.
[126] This can be seen particularly with reference to lesbian and drag-king cultures, whose sub-identities include 'stone butch', 'stone fem', 'boi' and 'daddy', to name but a few (*lesbian.com*, npg.).

Furthermore, it implies the possibility that the staff themselves will identify, and be identifiable, as LGBTQ, and will be figureheads of the community. Davey's performances utilise this liminality to challenge the audience's assumptions of identity by illustrating her lesbian sexuality in a variety of contexts. In the first instance, her ability to perform in male drag is contrasted against her 'Drag Hostess' role as the lesbian, Mingeeta Lickalotopus. She provided empirical evidence as to why the audience should redefine their conceptualisation of lesbian performance as a result of seeing her non-stereotypical portrayal, rather than basing their views on preconceptions of what lesbian performance 'should look like'. The activating factor in the relationship is moved from the onlooker's perspective to that of the individual, challenging, and sometimes reversing, many of Judith Butler's theories on gender, particularly that social identity is activated through the individual's relationship with an onlooker (1993). Davey's performance is an approach that effectively emancipates those who do not conform to identity stereotypes by reiterating that they are part of the community and should be treated as such. Obviously, while such a suggestion is apparently rather radical in the context of the respondent's community, the use of oppositional characters nevertheless risks merely creating more supposedly 'legitimate' identity categories.

Davey's performance, however, avoids this difficulty, if one presupposes occasions in which her performances are considered 'real' and override the onlooker's prior expectations and perception. Davey uses both first and third-person pronouns when describing Mingeeta ("[and] she's very bold and dominatrixy and she's – you don't know with Mingeeta! I am the pub threat" Davey 2006n). Additionally, as with the performers in *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), she uses the character as a method of play to discover other aspects of her persona, describing Mingeeta as "the part of me that if it was more

socially acceptable to be I'd probably be more of all the time" (Davey 2006n) and who epitomises confidence and willingness to experiment with other modes of behaviour. Thus, it is not only deviation from the accepted stereotype that her act promotes, but active experimentation with a variety of guises. In this respect, her act may be seen to advocate a truly LGBTQ persona that naturally encompasses a wider identity range than that open to heterosexuals. Ironically, this entails a theoretical reversal of the Harlem balls' concept of 'realness' (Livingston 1990). For example, when embodying physical femininity, particularly one lacking the irony associated with the femme stereotype and its relationship to patriarchal conventions, her presentation must remain confident. She is then accepted as a 'real' lesbian by simply being herself, rather than by conforming to an image, and thus asserts that others can do the same. As a result, ironically, she becomes a lesbian role model who actively refutes stereotypical roles.[127]

The performers are, however, restrained by the anticipated reception in their community. As stated in Chapter One of this thesis, moral undercurrents are contested by the respondents' statements that their performances were intended purely as entertainment. However, despite the constant use of comic images, performances such as "Ride on Time" (Hartman et al. 1989) and "Reformation" (anon.) appeared to comment on incongruities inherent within socially accepted notions of femininity. In both cases, male drag queen performers depicted women attempting to achieve expected behaviours of femininity, and indeed sociability, by pretending to become inebriated and either jostling the audience or

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[127] The acceptance of her 'realness' in these roles is suggested by her being propositioned by women following her numbers, implying their attraction to her embodiment of lesbian confidence. There is also the implication they felt they may gain kudos from having relations with a star of the show, and therefore, were also reiterating their own sexual orientation by having relations with someone posited as the epitome of the experience: a lesbian, performing as lesbian character, or a lesbian performing as a lesbian character who is in turn performing a lesbian's notions of other roles, and as a lesbian who is performing in a homosexual environment.

spraying them with their drink. As a result of their actions, the performers violated notions of acceptable conduct and, thus, were treated with slight apprehension by the audience, despite their obvious appreciation for the show.

Critiques of peer pressure: "Reformation" (left) and "Ride on Time" (right).

There is evidence that the performers attempt to circumnavigate, yet also reiterate, the notion that the performances should be validated by social worth. This is demonstrated in the performance style of CherAround (respondent Maddison). An actor and dancer trained at the Guildhall School of Drama, his performances and characterisation during the cabaret indicate the attention paid to the planning and conception of movement, emotional expression, and body language. Maddison also stated viewing his characters as separate personas:

> …you are just playing a part, you're just not yourself, once the makeup is on, you go away from that and you become the character […] if you've got a suit and a trilby hat you're playing a gangster in a play or something. (Maddison 2006a)

While not all of the characters he plays represent drag performance per se, they do appear to reflect his consciousness of representing the LGBTQ community. His response to the question, "is there anything you have not yet done in drag that you would like to do?" was:

> Erm, not really. I've done everything from being a be-tached old lady […] and I've even been out of drag dressed as a man doing funny sketches… so I've kind of covered over every kind of sort of bits and pieces. I suppose the only thing I'd like to do is to learn some more […] and teach myself some more complicated dance routines and more technical dance moves… (Ibid)

His emphasis on teaching himself more complicated dance moves is an indication that he wishes to use the performance for his own personal fulfilment. This attempt to validate his performances as a completion of his own personal goals suggests that he feels they may not otherwise be appreciated if the characters appear to fall outside of the drag tradition. There may be the suggestion that this theoretically invalidates them as 'proper' LGBTQ subject matter, and indeed subtly questions his integrity as an LGBTQ performer.

This perspective represents an alteration to Keil's concept of committed audiences, in which the performer is validated by the quality of the performance as determined by standards set by a knowledgeable peer group (quoted in Newton 1979). In contrast, the performances at @D2 appear to be justified as a celebration of the drag style and of the community itself. It is particularly interesting that Maddison's later comments on hoping that his audience would "see life from a different angle" (2006c) came when he was in full drag. This is the time he states that he considers himself to be the CherAround character and, thus, the epitome of LGBTQ identity. This 'mask' enabled him to articulate what appear to be socially unfashionable ideas, as they were stated by a character who could deem performances 'worthwhile' to the community and, therefore, to the art form itself.

They ironically suggest his espousal of Keil's "appreciative" audience structure as a method of attaining equality. In this theorisation, the audience are presented with a polished performance which suggests its validation not only as the tradition of the LGBTQ community, but also as an art form whose imagination and technical prowess equals those appreciated by the mainstream community.[128] This may, in turn, affect the communities' self-perception as one whose culture is validated by the mainstream.

Unlike the performances at the other venues studied, the presentations at @D2 did not develop a singular 'message' during the evening. Instead, by utilising drama and comedy as a method of portraying social commentary, they reaffirmed their cultural space by critiquing gender and sexuality stereotypes. This in turn enabled the development and recognition of their artistic heritage whilst encouraging an increased acceptance of a variety of sexual and gender roles to underpin their function as holistic providers for the LGBTQ community.

The LGBTQ audiences referenced thus far appeared receptive to the social commentaries presented by drag performance. This questions why performers appear to veil their messages within highly visual, often apparently crude, entertainment. While this chapter was in development, the researcher aimed to examine the political connotations of drag performances with acts varying from those with subtle connotations to those that were transparent in their wish to challenge their audiences' views. The venue-based fieldwork was planned to take place in August 2006, in order to maintain a time-specific sample group influenced by similar current affairs and news events. This sample was to include

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[128] A sentiment that was echoed by both Davey and Rose (2006). Unfortunately, time restrictions prevented the topic from being discussed in more detail.

Chloe Poems, the creation of performance artist Gerry Potter, whose best known poems include the provocatively titled "The Queen Sucks Nazi Cock" (npg.). However, it became apparent whilst interviewing Potter that it would not be possible to witness every act within the August 2006 time period. The Poems character had become a popular figure on the LGBTQ entertainment circuit as a result of appearances at the likes of The Royal Vauxhall Tavern's club night, Duckie, where Potter describes his performances as being based on erotic comic appeal. In the intervening years, Potter developed Poems' repertoire in line with his growing socialism, and to voice his opposition to what he considered to be the values of the modern LGBTQ community. At the 2006 Manchester LGBTQ Pride celebrations, it appears that Potter was removed from the stage for his own safety, so incensed were the audience, and he states he has fallen out of the community's favour.[129] During our initial interview, Potter was unable to recall any recent performances at an LGBTQ venue, and had no planned performances when this thesis was written. He now performs mainly for heterosexual audiences in heterosexual or arts-based venues, although short segments of his performances for LGBTQ audiences are available.[130]

As a result, the chapter will focus on the most compete video footage of his act available - a performance at a non-LGBTQ venue - to examine how he uses a variety of poetic styles and performance techniques to engage his audience and guide them along a progressively

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[129] Although it must be stated that accounts of the event attributed to Potter vary somewhat. For example, in "From Sexuality" (npg.), he states an individual attacked him, whereas in the interview for this thesis he states his act "almost caused a riot" (2006). The difference between the two accounts appears to be the emphasis given to his desire to challenge popular opinions.
[130] The researcher contacted Potter by telephone after first making contact a few days previously via email. As a result, although he had previously consented to be interviewed at that point, he was unprepared and may simply have forgotten the dates, and indeed performances, at LGBTQ venues.

political set.[131] This set culminates in an active challenge of social taboos, as well as transparent didacticism.[132]

The most complete visual record of Poems' act was recorded at Manchester's Joshua Brooks night club in February 2006 (npg.). The venue is situated in a busy, commercial area and focuses on providing a variety of specialist musical entertainment. Students are the core client group, and one may assume that the venue caters primarily for heterosexuals as it does not routinely present drag queens, and there is no mention on its website of homosexual clientele, although it is no doubt welcoming to all.

Poems' appearance was part of the Citizen 32 poetry performance festival (npg., parts one, two and three), and, thus, the audience was likely to expect some avant-garde acts presenting alternative perspectives. The recording begins with the compeer introducing Poems by reading a cue card stating: "Quite simply one of the finest performance poets in this land; Manchester's Voice of Treason, a radical agenda bender. Please give a warm welcome to Miss Chloe Poems" (Ibid, part one). As this introduction utilises titles that Poems uses frequently, such as on her website, "Smear Campaign" (npg.), the lines appear to have been given 'her' approval. The word "treason" hints at Poems' republicanism and suggests that her act will tackle issues of class and, therefore, of current social norms. If, as

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[131] The term "complete" refers to an unbroken recording. Recordings of other performances are of relatively equal length, but as they are edited to represent individual poems, they are somewhat unreliable as a tool to gauge the audience's reactions to the performance as a whole.
[132] Potter has commented in "From Sexuality" (npg.) that he is failing to convey his political message if he feels the atmosphere at a performance is too "cosy". His use of an amiable character highlights pragmatism as it enables him to convey his message to others who may not ordinarily agree with his perspectives.

a result of the female name, the audience expected a traditional drag queen, their expectations were to be confounded.[133]

Poems takes her place on stage (npg., part one). She wears a pink shirt with white cuffs and collar, and while these colours are traditionally considered feminine, the cut of the cloth is loose and square, accentuating her male physique, as does her use of a man's patterned necktie (Lurie 1983). She wears chequered trousers, traditional masculine attire, though the choice of pattern is vibrant, setting her apart from associations of conventional, authoritative patriarchy (Ibid).[134] The main allusion to transvestism is her wig - a feminine bob, complete with a fringe, and vibrant facial make-up. In conjunction, as no mention has been made of the performer's sex or gender identity, in promoting or announcing the act, the audience is led to react to the character initially as one whose appearance challenges sex-role norms. This is a relatively confrontational approach in a primarily heterosexual venue, and may cause apprehension in audience members unfamiliar with the concerns of the LGBTQ community. Therefore, they may not have an emotional attachment to the material on which to focus their attention as paying customers.

As the camera is situated near the stage (npg., part one), neither the audience's gestures or emotional reactions are visible. There is no evidence of whether or not Poems is the first act, or indeed how the audience may have reacted to previous acts, and, thus, it is not

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[133] They are also less likely to expect the socially abrasive feminism associated with popular acts such as Lily Savage. When played to a heterosexual audience, such performers' anecdotes work to be accepted by, and to offer commentary for, the audiences' female community.

[134] Poems often wears gingham, as she believes it be symbolic of her socialist views, with each strand of material being essential to complete the pattern, as stated in the article, "Working Class Hero in a Gingham Dress" (npg.). She does not, however, reference this during the performance, so its political significance may be lost on the audience.

possible to compare their reaction to her.[135] While applause and cheers are heard, the compeer raises his hand and asks the audience to develop their welcome with the words "come on, ladies and gentlemen, come on, come on!", suggesting he expected a more sustained reaction. This suggests that the audience lack interest in Poems' act before she begins, and, therefore, may not readily be swayed by her political ideologies. Potter, who appears prepared for this eventuality, has asserted that Poems' appearance and persona is designed to facilitate the conveyance of his concerns by presenting them in a visually entertaining format:

> I think one of the reasons [for performing in drag] is that if I was wearing jeans and a T-shirt it would be really easy to say there's that ranting socialist. With the dress you can't do that - there's this kind of mechanism that says this isn't a ranting socialist, although it is a ranting socialist, it's also entertainment!!! (*Designer Magazine*, npg.)

While Poems does not always wear a dress, her appearance always has heavily feminine connotations and the eccentricities of the character become the first focus of the act. Thus, as Potter points out, the audience are less likely to expect a socialist performance. Poems' costume is not, however, misleading, as the juxtaposition of masculine attire and feminine facial preparation are the "perception or creation of incongruous juxtapositions" that Esther Newton has cited as the basis of performative camp (Newton 1979 106). Additionally, John Latham Fisher has commented that "[a] live audience is crucial because camp *plays* to that audience, solicits its responses, and responds back. In this way camp is a dialogue between house and stage" (Latham Fisher 2000 22).

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[135] While *Citizen 32 Magazine* (npg.) and others, such as the *Write Words Writers' Community* (npg.) stipulate the show's running order, it is impossible to discount changes to the programme that may have occurred on the night of the performance.

In this performance, however, Poems' presentation subverts the camp relationship between the performer and the audience. Rather than presenting a purely comic image encouraging the "laughs, boos, sighs, hoots and hollered interjections" (Ibid) of the audience, it reflects Latham Fisher's definition of the language of camp performers and includes: "… direct audience address, winks, self-referentiality, and meta-contextuality" (Ibid). In this vein, Poems' costume represents a male playing a female character, who wears male clothing that carries connotations of authority. Thus, the audience is invited to enter into a relationship in which Poems self-consciously aims to teach an authoritative viewpoint, but 'buys' this privilege by presenting a comic image that acknowledges the audience's intelligence by inviting the performance's very deconstruction.

Potter establishes Poems' persona as soon as she enters the stage (npg., part one). Without further introduction, Poems sings Liberty X's "Just a Little" (2002) unaccompanied, adding gestures to reference herself and the audience. The song is half spoken, half sung and is performed by Poems with her arms outstretched and her hands spread in a vague waving gesture. This lends the performance an improvisational edge that establishes a friendly intimacy with the audience, and suggests a reduction of the possibility of political sloganeering. Poems concludes the song and then thanks the audience in a comically contrasting, low-pitched voice that suggests an erstwhile hidden modesty and playful character. This earns brief applause and laughter from the audience in acceptance of the complexity of the presentation.

Following some banter to which the audience doesn't appear to respond, Poems jokingly admonishes herself for procrastinating, before advertising her book, again without response. She then introduces her first piece, "Something Red in a Tart's Glass" ("Poems",

npg.), concerning a woman considered "wonderful" by her neighbours, yet who has a "dark and encompassing secret", a line to which Poems adds dramatic emphasis by deepening the pitch and tone of her voice to indicate the poem's comic intent (npg., part one). Poems informs the audience that she will perform as the character, Audry Pringle, whom she comically suggests the audience think of as "Penelope Keith and Penelope Keith", an actress specialising in synonymous, haughty, middle-class roles (Ibid). This ensures that the subsequent characterisation, and Pringle's potentially hypocritical views, are theoretically distanced from Poems' own self-admonishment and slightly bumbling, friendly persona. Poems, thus, presents an argument that critiques social norms without tarnishing her performative role as the audience's comic friend.

The poem satirises the social expectations of the middle classes. Pringle is established as a prim character through Poems' use of minimal gestures and a controlled voice. She has attempted to be socially accepted by crafting an image in compliance with apparently opposing social ideals. She demonstrates charitable intent and restraint through participation in voluntary religious activities, espousing traditional values ("a pillar of the community, I believe in village unity", "Poems", npg.), and, conversely, through conspicuous consumption as a demonstration of wealth and consequent superior social standing.

Poems' presentation of male and female symbols removes the concept of gender from the satire. As she is not dressed as Pringle, she refrains from alienating the women in the audience by critiquing their traditional acceptance of the role as a physical manifestation of conspicuous consumption (for example as 'trophy wives') in the way that a drag queen may behave ("From Sexuality", npg.). Instead, she repositions her response to the society in

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general, which she states, "is drowning in possessions and […] making everybody decadently apathetic" ("London Easy", npg.). The comic effect results from the character's struggle to balance the socially expected role with her straining sexual and 'anti-social' instincts, demonstrated in the line "I see myself as bawdy, tawdry, not just plain Audry" which delight the audience in their comic self-depreciation of her dualistic impulses (npg., part one). It is a comic framework that Maurice Charney has defined as "[dealing] in stereotypes [that] break loose from their moorings and engage in fresh appraisals, but [in which] the latter is counterpointed against the former" (Charney 1980 51).

However, Poems prevents the piece from becoming an unqualified attack on the values and apparent hypocrisy Pringle attempts to uphold by investing her with what Potter has referred to in interview as "integrity", evinced by a wide range of emotions including fear, lust, and pride which prevent her from becoming a parody (Potter 2006). These emotions enable the character to be seen as a cipher for a large percentage of the population who may face similar pressures, and thus Potter's characterisation permits the audience to laugh in empathy at their own recognition of her plight. This is particularly evident where the character joyfully liberates herself from social constraints through a fantasy in which she leads the village in an orgy, revelling in a display of expletives and extravagant arm gestures, to the laughter of the audience. The poem concludes with Pringle ceasing her fantasy, having 'noticed' the audience. She exhorts them to live out their own fantasies, and finishes to loud applause. The applause is accepted and encouraged by Poems, who has resumed her role as the main character, as is indicated by her raised vocal pitch.[136] The poem follows a classic comic schema which, as Charney suggests:

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[136] The initial applause lasts for ten seconds, and then continues for another fourteen seconds upon Poems' acceptance of the praise. With the exception of the more subdued applause for "Let Angela Sooth You",

> …[contains] the comfortable and familiar feeling we receive from comedy: that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. We feel at home in comedy even when the characters seem to be anarchic, destructive and revolutionary. We are therefore confident that all impulses, no matter how negative, come from characters whose heart is in the right place and whose good will is going to be validated by the happy ending. It is difficult to escape from the prevailingly optimistic tone. (Charney 1980 50)

This "prevailingly optimistic tone" (Ibid) is the excitement and opportunity Pringle's fantasy offers both herself and the audience. It has a distinctively carnivalesque flavour, as Pringle not only retains the memory of her mental adventure, but also the promise of more to come. This, in itself, is a direct introduction to the process by which Poems' characters collectively exhibited an emotional and intellectual evolution as the performance progressed. It is also an indication to the audience that their participation as viewers will entail a similar journey of discovery. The structure does, however, act as reassurance to the audience; just as Pringle's fantasy promises her a graduated development, so too will theirs. The carnivalesque aspects of the performance will not advocate a literal destruction of social norms, but will gradually suggest a reconfiguration of social perceptions to offer emotional fulfilment that will be welcomed by the now enthusiastic audience. As Charney states, "[if] purging the humours is comic therapy, then we might well prefer the sickness to the cure. We would like to believe that the pretenders merely suffer temporary setbacks and will emerge again in full flower" (Charney 1980 62-63). In Poems' (and, therefore, the audience's) case, the temporary setback that is normality is merely the precursor to a more fantastical way of life.

(npg., part two) which is not a poem designed to illicit emotion as much as to provoke thought, each performance received around ten seconds of audience response. This may indicate that the audience enjoyed each poem in equal measure, or that there is a suggestion of the standardised response to appreciation.

The next poem demonstrates the benefits of Poems' presentation as a feminised character who retains the creator's maleness, as it represents the beginning of Potter's act's transition to focus on LGBTQ politics. Poems introduces the poem as a dedication to "adorable young men" wearing "their nylon pantaloons", before stating - "I think they call them tracksuit bottoms now" (npg., part one). The word 'adorable' denoted religious devotion before its usage broadened to incorporate the signification of romantic or aesthetic affection. These dual concepts suggest that the characters will be loveable to the extent of eligibility for deification. As tracksuit bottoms, excepting their sporting association, are often popularly perceived to indicate the wearer's disregard for socially conventional, smart attire, it is clear that the piece is a romanticisation of delinquency associated with working-class ethics and culture in the popular imagination.

The mock uncertainty as to whether "pantaloons" is the correct, modern term for trousers is evidently performed for comic contrast (Ibid). Importantly, the use of the archaic term "pantaloons" (Ibid) questions whether the Poems character – who would seem an unlikely candidate for this level of formality, particularly after singing "Just a Little" (2002) - is performing her own perspective or that of a traditional, middle-class woman similar to Pringle from "Something Red in a Tart's Glass" (npg., part one). It suggests the possibility that Potter has simply forgotten to mention the transition of character during the apparently the ad-libbed introductions. If the character is Poems, this introduces the audience to the possibility of the Potter/Poems amalgamation's own sexuality as a result of his/her affection for the young men. Thus, Poems may be considered as transgender or homosexual as a result of the partially feminine appearance, reflecting Poems' core purpose as a character externalising gender incongruities in order to examine their effects within a social

context.[137] This suggests that by utilising the sympathetic Poems' character, Potter is able to gradually present ideas associated with Queer Theory that can challenge the audience's perceptions of sex and gender stereotypes without alienating those who do not identify as such.

Throughout the section, Poems uses crude, erotic language to comic effect to indicate the disparate, confused gender stereotype his performance represents, commenting on the youths' "firm, ruddy arses" (npg., part one) and leaning into the microphone and tightening his body and facial expression to indicate the physical pleasure generated by the thought. The comic delivery encourages the audience to accept the Poems character talking from a personal perspective about erotic, and explicitly homosexual ideation, rather than remaining a mere cipher of potential homosexuality. They are invited to share her appreciation of male bodies as Poems alters the context to aesthetic credibility by comparing the youths' physiques to the works of Shakespeare and naming them as "works of art" (Ibid). The audience appear ready to accept this perspective as Poems earns a deep and apparently appreciative laugh when he states the poem's title, "Why Do Roughs Have Such Tight Buns?" ("Poems", npg.). The twin emphasis on "Roughs" (slang for the working class) and sexuality is a primary driver behind Poems' performances, as Potter has commented: "Politics has always been very important to me, and also the socialisation of sexuality, so I wanted to present a theatrical moment that combined all those compulsions" ("London Easy", npg.). The poem encourages the audience to consider this "socialisation" through references to sexuality transcending sex and gender divides.[138] To do this, Poems' use of

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[137] As was discussed with Potter in the respondent interview (2006).
[138] This references Poems' core belief that the bioorganic nature of humanity equalises the human race regardless of physiological differences.

language firstly satirises the variation between social classes, apparently using a traditional framework, as described by Charney:

> Comic convention postulates a society that is rigidly hierarchical. By the laws of decorum […] different social classes have their prescribed styles, both of manners and of speech. The hierarchy is conveniently divided into three major categories: high, middle and low… (Charney 1980 51)

This can be applied to Poems' earlier mock-query of clothing terminology associated with the working-classes, which suggests she represents the social perception of the "middle" classes, being "neither exalted nor base, particularly vicious nor especially virtuous" (Charney 1980 51). She is, however, also comfortable using expletives, which is emphasised through the audience's shock at the comic contrast, as cursing is considered the language of "low characters" (Ibid), or the working-classes, which is

> …unpredictable and outside the expectations of social decorum. It is vivid, colloquial, slangy, pungent, and wild. Talk is an expressive medium rather than one that communicates anything rational. Ideas are more or less banished from this discourse, which moves hyperbolically and by free association. (Charney 1980 52-53)

This notion of a class-based language structure suggests that it reflects intelligence and, thus, implies that social hierarchy represents natural selection, with the 'lows' considered incapable of "anything rational" (Ibid) and are, therefore, relegated. Poems' use of both styles disputes this argument by suggesting linguistic divisions are learned behaviour (npg., part one). Moreover, she suggests that not only can a middle-class character be attracted to a working-class character, but that this attraction can overcome the lack of understanding between classes by illustrating their comparable aims and, therefore, thought processes. For

instance, in the poem, the "Roughs" love of sport indicates an ethos of productivity that results in attainment of fitness regardless of adverse circumstances such as incarceration: "is it because of playing football and running away from stolen cars / perhaps from lifting irons behind bars" (npg., part one). Charney suggests that such detail bestows "sociological authenticity" that actually gets "in the way of their comic potential", particularly as "anyone reading the newspaper would tend to think just the reverse" (Charney 1980 52). This last point makes Poems' distinction more apparent, as it has been commented that: "the white working class are the only people that [as a result of political correctness] you can blatantly attack" ("Kate Nash" in *The Times Magazine*, 4th August 2007 40). The audience would anticipate the joke, yet question their own perspectives when confronted with Poems' refusal to condemn the "Roughs'" activities and, indeed, her concurrent praise of their culture (npg., part one).

Poems' performance prevents her argument from becoming too confrontational through interspersed absurdist questions that do not reflect the poem's theme and encourage the audiences continued attention through laughter at the contrast in their content. Lines such as – "if a jogger's not jogging, has he got the runs?" are rhymed and, thus, linguistically linked with erotic metaphors in which Poems directly indicates her physical attraction for the "Roughs" and their "buns" (Ibid).

In addition, the audience are encouraged to consider the theme from the perspective of the working-class member being the sexually assertive partner. This reflects Potter's interest in the socialisation of homosexuality, namely his perception that the stereotyped notion of homosexuals ("an elitist club where homosexual men are defined by bulging and oily muscles [and] big wallets and are problem free princes of success", "Working Class Hero

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in a Gingham Dress", npg.) is inaccurate. In this vein, "Why do Roughs Have Such Tight Buns?" asserts: "if you're the poker, let me be your fire" – thus, using the image of the long, thin fire poker as a phallic symbol, while the centre of the fire represents the place where the poker receives the most concentrated heat ("Poems", npg.). All that is stipulated is that Poems, as the fire, has an orifice – it is not indicated whether this is the imagined vagina of a transsexual, or a homosexual man's anus. Poems does not make clear which sexual roles are taken during the practice, but only that it excludes biologically-based heterosexuality. Thus, Poems' supposition that her invitation may be accepted contests the implicit relationship between wealth and active homosexuality, while her focus on the "Rough's" criminal activities indicates that not only are homosexuals found in different social stratas, they are necessarily neither effeminate, nor of good character (Ibid).[139] Poems' message is clearly that homosexuality is independent of class, appearances, interests or, indeed, conventional morality.

Poems' performance of "Why Do Roughs Have Such Tight Buns?" is energetic, highly physical, and audibly well received (npg., part one). The effect of its position within the set is made clear as a result of its comparisons to the next performance. By maintaining the audience's complicity using the comic character to introduce the concept of other sexualities, Potter facilitates their acceptance of a serious portrayal of sexuality and power relationships. For, when introducing the poem "Let Angela Sooth You" (npg., part two), Potter appears to speak as himself (thereby also suggesting that such relationships may be enjoyed by theoretically unlikely persons, such as his Poems alter-ego). He remains largely static, displays limited gestures, and the volume and pitch of his voice are noticeably far

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[139] Indeed, in the introduction to the later poem, "Gothic", Poems states that while she approves of homosexual practices such as cruising, she is not suggesting that homosexuals should be seen in an entirely positive light, but that "they can also be very silly" (npg., part two).

lower and less theatrical. He informs the audience that the piece concerns 'Angela', a transgendered prostitute acquaintance who specialised in sadism and masochism, and that he will perform the poem as one of her "punters" (Ibid). The word "punter" connotes gambling and criminal activity, and as Potter does not emphasise the word, he strips the poem of any comic potential, although his use of this different persona enables him to perform this increasingly controversial dialogue without alienating the audience. He does, however, apparently consider it necessary to further encourage their attention by complimenting them as "creatives" able to imagine, contemplate and critically appreciate his performance of socially challenging perspectives (Ibid).

Potter's performance is intense and restrained: he sways slowly on the spot, grasping the microphone close to his face while holding it aloft, presumably as a metaphorical demonstration of the power relationships involved in sadism and masochism. However, this is one performance whose objective appears to be contested by the audience. As Potter describes pleasure generated through the physical harm incurred during an encounter, a quiet, high-pitched, somewhat nervous laugh can be heard from the audience. It breaks the silence and is an audible diversion to the performance and challenges the tension that has been developed. As the interjection is laughter, it suggests that the performance has failed to generate an atmosphere accepting of different sexual practices; the interjector is embarrassed or amused rather than mentally or erotically stimulated. The laughter acts as a contestation of the seriousness of the performance and has the effect of audibly encouraging its reconceptualisation within a more comic framework focusing on the humour of embarrassment or contrast. Potter, however, continues undeterred, concluding by speaking the final line quietly into the microphone, and the subsequent applause is quieter for this performance, perhaps reflecting its tone. However, a spoken cheer is heard.

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The voice and volume suggest it is Poems' long-time collaborator, Rosie Lugosi, who sits near the camera and engages Poems in banter periodically throughout the evening. The interjection is jubilant, rather than sombre, and, thus, does not reflect the mood in the room. It suggests that the audience should accept the change of the performance's tone, and adjust their expectations accordingly. Its very vocalization validates the standard of the performance to encourage sustained interest in the act.

The next performance is considerably lighter in tone and acts to release the audience's tension (npg., part two). The Poems persona apparently returns to discuss 'cruising' - defined by the *OED Online* (accessed 10th September 2006) as "the action of walking or driving about the streets in search of casual sexual partners". The discussion marks the most didactic point of the act. Potter has commented:

> I intend to inform. There is a didactic polemic element that runs throughout my work. I'm aware some people find this difficult, but I deal in the truth. It is a sadomasochistic relationship, the Truth is my bittersweet master and I am its sweet and bitter bitch. The accusation of trying to shock is levelled at me often. ("Vanity Project", npg.)

This didacticism is demonstrated in his preamble, in which he continues with a frank discussion of the dangers of cruising, which is primarily considered to be a homosexual practice. The difficulties associated with this approach are also in evidence throughout his introduction. He appears, rather apprehensively, to test the audience's reaction to the topic, with his head lowered, his eye-line directed to the floor, and his body arched towards the house. This physicality indicates conscious communication, as he is pushing his argument towards the audience, while remaining defensive, and literally protecting his body from any adverse reactions. When none occur, he establishes direct communication with the audience

via a discussion with Rosie Lugosi, in which he describes how she inspired the next poem, thus establishing a theoretical common ground between all parties (npg., part two). Having discussed sexuality through alternative characters and the Poems persona, Potter now references his own sexuality.[140] He indicates that he is homosexual and that he cruises, theorising the activity as a psychic phenomenon. He demonstrates his "third eye" by turning his back to the audience and bending over to indicate his anus as a reception point for "gaydar" (*OED Online,* accessed 15th August 2007).

He opines that cruising is "marvellous", giving a 'thumbs-up' sign to congratulate any male spectators who may have cruised, before adding that their wives may not be aware (npg., part two). As a result, he refrains from risking gratuitous offence by avoiding directly questioning their place within heteronormative social structures, and his insinuation becomes comic as a result of the playful, bawdy set. Appearing to attempt to garner good will, he then suggests that women should be "allowed" to cruise, a pronouncement that is greeted with several female cheers from the audience. His dialogue asserts that cruising can result in freedom and physical pleasure, in order to establish the practice as a worthwhile endeavour. It then utilises popular notions of equality to suggest the practice should be socially acceptable as a result of its benefits. However, the issue of the activities' social acceptability forms the poem's core message. As the *OED Online*'s definition states, 'cruising' can be defined as the search for casual sexual relations and suggests that "the most respectable class [of homosexuals] are those who do no 'cruising'".[141] While the prevalence of this perception may have declined over time, Potter's approach to the subject matter confirms that it is still considered somewhat tawdry. Indeed, the word "casual"

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[140] All of the respondents interviewed periodically spoke from their own perspectives whilst their characters were performing comic routines. They are more likely to state that their characters are a separate and totally fictitious persona if questioned in an apparently serious manner.
[141] When the definition first connoted homosexuality in 1927 (*OED Online*, accessed 5th September 2006).

(Ibid) implies of a lack of preplanning, afterthought, and, therefore, a lack of care, emotion and 'worth'.

It is this suggestion that Poems seeks directly to challenge in his piece, "Gothic" ("Poems", npg.). The poem depicts cruising as a method of achieving intense emotional responses via the romantically uncomplicated immediacy of mutual pleasure and understanding. Poems' first-person narration suggests that this intensity facilitates transcendence of emotional constraints and the stasis of social environments, stating that he and his sexual partner (the product of his cruising) "can do no wrong / [as their] love is so strong it can outstrip time" (npg., part two).

Potter performs the piece with vigour, using dramatic physical movements to capture the audiences' attention. His voice quickens and changes to create an atmosphere of exhilaration to suggest the emotional states attained through participation in cruising. These are held in direct contrast to the experiences of unexciting, finite emotions – those that do not "outstrip time" as a result of their genesis within monogamous relationships governed by the social and familial norms, indicated by "two up two down" (Ibid) houses rather than those ruled by the personal, spiritual fulfilment of the individual. It is important to note that Poems stipulates that cruising can be performed as "boy girl, girl boy, or any number of combinations" (Ibid) as he is not attempting to convert the audience to engage in homosexual relationships. He is instead directly advocating aspects of other sexual cultures to develop their own emotional experiences, while also gaining an understanding of difference.

"Gothic's" challenge to the posited social repression of sexual desires represents a life-affirming crowd-pleaser that gains the audience's good will, demonstrated in cheers and

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applause, before the final performance, "I Wanna be Fucked by Jesus" (npg., part three). This is the poem for which Potter has received the most overt criticism, as a result of its controversial subject matter.[142] He remains defiant, however, stating:

> I'm inspired by the forgotten stories of the forgotten classes. I empathise with struggle and the rewards and miseries it can bring. The world isn't alright now, not even the Christian Western World. I feel it is my job to highlight this. ("Vanity Project", npg.)

Potter again presents as himself during an introduction in which he states that the poem is autobiographical. He contrasts traditional, patriarchal religion with the advent of LGBTQ culture in the lines "I used to be an altar boy, now I'm an altered boy", to earn continued interest and sympathy from the audience. He then describes how the poem reflects the personal dilemma he faced as a twelve-year-old altar boy attempting to reconcile his developing understanding of the Catholic church's stance against homosexuality with his sexual and emotional attraction to the figure of Jesus. This changes the dynamic of his relationship with the audience from that of a performer illustrating an embellished or fictitious account for their benefit, as had been the case in the previous poems, to that of a transparent relationship in which he can speak honestly about his experiences and disregard political correctness. Indeed, such is the confessional nature of the material, the event gains the atmosphere of a group of friends who have been taken into confidence whilst discussing shared experiences and knowledge. Not only does this reinforce a sense of the objectivity of Potter's upbringing and, therefore, present evidence for the poem's sociological argument, it also suggests it has implications for the audience's own views and experiences.

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[142] As stated in interview in which Potter confirmed he has been threatened with physical violence during performances (2006).

Potter reverts to his native, Liverpudlian accent for the duration of the poem itself. Although this is obviously an affectation to suggest authenticity during the performance, the intonation and dialect contrast with the mature Potter's standard English pronunciation to provide an 'honest' depiction of his confusion as a child.[143] His awareness of his sexuality formed in the shadow of the homophobic society in which he grew up, thus challenging the assumed experience of LGBTQ identity as one of 'frivolous' acceptance.[144]

In the poem, references to his mother's assurances that Jesus "loves" him are compared with the feelings of closeness generated by a physical encounter with a local youth (npg., part three). While the explicitness of the language indicates his excitement at discovering his sexuality, it is in comic contrast to his feelings for a youth who is "not a perfect man" (Ibid). The experience leaves Potter emotionally unsatisfied and aware of the potential for social and religious disapproval. His amorous longing for Jesus is, thus, largely resultant from his misinterpretation of Christian theology. He had interpreted Jesus' empathy with suffering as sympathy for his own developing sense of alienation from heteronormative culture and feels that it presents the basis for a mutually supportive relationship.

In addition, God is perceived as a benefactor who will answer appropriate prayers, and the piece is, therefore, performed as a recreation, with Potter's hands clasped to the microphone and his eyes raised in imitation of this theoretically direct communication. This presents a confrontational challenge to religious and social doctrine by portraying their apparently

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[143] Of these experiences, he has commented: "People are poetic without being poets. I want to give that hard language back to the people, but keep it poetic. It's my own Scouse language and I want people to hear that voice" ("Morning Star", npg.).
[144] As discussed during the respondent interview (2006).

negative effect on a highly sympathetic character who, nevertheless, seeks their guidance and is depicted as a well-meaning victim of his circumstances.

This readies the audience for what Potter calls "I Wanna be Fucked by Jesus: Part Two" (npg., part three). On the nature of the morality of comedy, Charney has commented:

> The morality of comedy is a favourite academic subject, and most comedies go out of their way to assure us that evil will be punished and good rewarded. What else is the happy ending, but a final reassurance that the good people have triumphed… (Charney 1980 59)

The poem's final segment is an expression of this perspective. Potter introduces this section by stating that he is no longer a Christian, before beginning a verse in which he states that he has accepted his sexuality and no longer fears social recrimination, as a result of "taking those childhood insults and turning them into a positive force" (npg., part three). In addition, his attraction to Jesus is now defiant. This is demonstrated by his subversion of the text of the Catholic confessional that formed the first section of the poem: "I do not need your forgiveness, Father, for I have not sinned" (Ibid). He taunts Christian doctrine with lines such as "I want him [Jesus] to cum / Right up my bum", and finishes by repeating the title as an act of defiance (Ibid). Despite the obscenity, Potter may be classed as one of Charney's "good people" (1980 59) as a result of the empathy his performance has engendered, and this section of the narrative is greeted by cheers and laughter. While his performance and costume indicate his social concerns, they also represent the defiance of a person who has utilised his identity to overcome these personal circumstances. In addition, he delivers a social message that, as a result of its sheer provocation, arrests the

audience's sensibility in order to highlight the disparity of the social conventions he intends to convey:

> The idea then was to make the character desperately political while at the same time using traditional drag images which then in a funny way heightens the sense of the politic - you don't expect someone in a dress to say "The Queen Sucks Nazi Cock"!!! (*Designer Magazine*, npg.)

He finishes the performance segment by advocating "…the end of bullying and abusing children by religion" (npg., part three), before thanking the audience. The extent of the audience's reaction suggests his performance has largely succeeded in its aim to inform whilst entertaining.[145] Poems' use of a variety of performance techniques has enabled him to perform a set that challenges socially accepted attitudes towards sexuality whilst retaining the interest of his audience. As Potter states, "If I did it as me it would not have the impact or the cushion that Chloe gives" (*Designer Magazine*, npg.).

The performances discussed in this chapter illustrate how drag uses theatrical styles such as comedy and social realism to impart a political agenda to their audiences. The level to which this aim is transparent is, however, highly dependant on the venue's anticipated clientele. In the case of The Birdcage, which, first and foremost, aims to be an entertainment venue for a heterosexual audience, the drag queens provide a mixture of satire and populist references that gradually advance a thesis for female empowerment as perceived through a heteronormative, patriarchal kin system. They appear to demonstrate

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[145] It cannot be stated that the entire audience concurs with this view. During the second section of the narrative, a door is heard to open twice. This happens out of shot and we do not know whether the audience member leaves or returns, or indeed for what reasons. Poems states audiences frequently leave his performances as a result of offence, but that he considers this a positive reaction as it indicates his performance has been able to make an impact (*Citizen 32 Magazine*, npg.).

(through the songs they perform) that women can have control within the marriage framework, find fulfilment and impact on their culture without alienating themselves from more traditional perceptions of marriage as a partnership of differing, if not unequal, roles and rights. In doing so, the drag queens make their message emotionally resonant for the female target audience.

In contrast, the LGBTQ-orientated public houses offer different attractions based on what appears to be their traditional form of community interaction. In The New Penny, one of the longest-running LGBTQ owned and orientated establishments in England, the minimalist entertainment largely results from the community's own reaffirmation as the crowd themselves mount the stage to receive praise for, and demonstrate aspects of, their identities and relationships. Alternatively, at the more recently established public house and nightclub, @D2, the performers' cabarets challenge cultural stereotypes that they feel are damaging or short-sighted in order to reflect and encourage the community's diversity, as Charney's (1980) criticism was used to illustrate. Their success in this endeavour was illustrated by their sheer popularity amongst the audience.

Ironically, the act that was most self-consciously political was the one performed to a non-LGBTQ audience – that of Gerry Potter (as character Chloe Poems). This final performance utilised dramatic monologues presented by differing characters interspersed with the friendly, slightly bumbling Poems persona to gradually introduce the audiences to potentially controversial topics. It culminated, naturally, with Potter playing his younger self in a reflection of his experiences as a homosexual altar boy, and a call to end child abuse.

Each of these diverse performances reflected the tension in LGBTQ community's performative tradition of providing education alongside the more recent conception that the value of performance is its ability to entertain all audiences. This was the case regardless of the performances' apparent budget or the target audience. The next chapter will demonstrate how the communities utilise the structure of the carnival to bring their brand of gender dialogue to a wider local audience in order to further regenerate their communities.

Chapter Four: Theatres of Social Change

The previous chapter of this thesis demonstrated how drag performers utilise local nightclubs and public houses as performance spaces where they can deliver social commentary to their audiences. This is not their only method of, or indeed space for, interaction with their local communities, however. This chapter will posit that LGBTQ groups use outdoor performance events such as Pride carnivals, open to all sections of society, to extrapolate the drag queen's gender discourse. In the first instance, a discussion of the politics of the visibility of LGBTQ identities will demonstrate how drag queens engender a process of identity critique that can be understood through the theoretical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the bodily grotesque (Iswolsky 1984) and Mary Russo's ideation of female taboo (1997). Following this, Bakhtin's conceptualisation of carnivalesque liminality will illustrate how carnival participants can consider their identity in light of this gender discourse.

The focus will then alter to examine the carnival's efficacy as a piece of political theatre. For this, models of carnival violence posited by Bakhtin (Iswolsky 1984) and Mike Presdee (2000) will be used to demonstrate how the LGBTQ community critiques hegemonies, both within the community and the mainstream, to continually facilitate regeneration. An examination of the first English Gay Pride carnival, organised by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), will reveal how the use of comic and social-levelling techniques associated with the carnivalesque enabled the organisation to establish its political message.

Following this, the chapter will demonstrate how two recent carnivals reveal the impact made by the GLF, as well as showcasing how recently developed methodologies further the

acceptance of non-exclusively heterosexual identities through the utilisation of authoritarian governmental structures.

Finally, carnivals will be shown to provide a support structure that enables the continual development of the community. The events will be demonstrated to effectively critique the mainstream community's perception of LGBTQ people, and, as a result, challenge their oppression.

In order to examine the social role of LGBTQ Pride carnivals, it is first essential to establish the root of the obstacles that the community face. LGBTQ communities have long been viewed unfavourably by mainstream society. This is evinced by the widespread historical prohibition of consensual sexual intercourse between males, as well as other forms of discrimination against those who do not identify as heterosexual. In the United Kingdom, the prohibition of sexual intercourse between males was lifted in the comparatively recent year of 1967.[146] It remains entirely illegal in other parts of the world, including twenty-nine African countries (*Afrol News,* npg.).

However, LGBTQ people are not the only social group to face marginalisation, overt or covert. Other such groups include those with a minority faith or ethnicity. The discrimination that LGBTQ people face is, nevertheless, different to these others due to the theoretical rationalisation and root cause of homophobic perspectives. Ned Rorem's comparison of the concepts of homosexuality and racism based on skin colour indicates the rationale of this difference:

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[146] Legislation protecting LGBTQ workers from dismissal on the basis of their sexuality was introduced in England as recently as December 2003 – a mere four years ago, at the time of writing (*Stonewall,* npg.).

Unlike negritude, homosexuality is not physically spottable… A black when he is not Uncle Tommying is still black, and he's still black when he solves an algebraic equation. Is a queer queer when out of bed? When solving equations? Homosexuals have options: like heretics they can repent. A black cannot repent: he can only regret or be proud. (1987 15)

This statement posits a tension in the conceptualisation of homosexuality. Rorem's phrase, "homosexuality is not physically spottable", (Ibid) is indicative of the perception that homosexuality could be a biological predisposition as it is compared to a physical indicator of race. However, his inclusion of the term "options" indicates that he feels that in empirical terms the word 'homosexual' should be used as an adjective as its primary indicator is behaviour rather than visible physical characteristics such as skin tone. Moreover, the term "options" posits homosexuality as a choice rather than a physical necessity, and indeed the statement suggests, by the use of the term "repent", that it is an erroneous choice due to the assertion of moral impropriety.

Definitions of the term "repent" shed further light on the perspective that the physical connotations and denotations of homosexuality can be hidden. The word (which, though primarily a verb, has recorded usages as a noun and adjective) can be defined in the following ways: "an act of atonement"; "[being] unable to rise to high ideas" (*OED Online,* accessed 17th October 2006), this figurative use suggesting the subject to be degenerate, creating pathos. A further definition indicates the nature of disapproval: "To feel regret, sorrow, or contrition for (something inherently wrong, some fault, misconduct, sin, or other offence)" (Ibid). As Rorem uses the term "repent" (1987 15) alongside the invocation of heretical ideation, there is the suggestion that while homosexuality may be seen as

physiological, abstinence from same-sex behaviour cannot provide redemption if the desiring aspect itself can be perceived as "inherently wrong" (*OED Online*, accessed 17th October 2006). As a result, to not only advocate homosexual ideation but also engage in same-sex relations increases the moral impropriety of indulging in behaviour that is considered erroneous. While other marginalized groups automatically physiologically display their identity, the statement suggests that homosexuality is condemned primarily as a status that can, and should, be hidden.

As Rorem's statement suggests that homosexuality should be hidden, his reference to "Uncle Tommying" (or 'Uncle Tomming' as it is more commonly known) is useful to enable an understanding of how the LGBTQ Pride parades have challenged oppression. The phrase 'Uncle Tomming' is derived from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and is adapted from "the name of the hero, [which is] used allusively for a Black man who is submissively loyal or servile to White men" (*OED Online,* accessed 7th February 2007). The phrase also has the less formally acknowledged connotations of "[a] pejorative for a black person who is perceived by other blacks as subservient to white authority figures, or as seeking ingratiation with them by way of unnecessary accommodation" (*Wikipedia*, npg., accessed 22nd October 2006). It is the nuance of this second definition that is of particular interest here.[147] This definition moves beyond being "servile", which suggests compulsion to obey, to "unnecessary accommodation" – going beyond what is expected. "Unnecessary accommodation" appears to refer to the alteration of behavior unrelated to the completion of the tasks. Conversely, in a servile relationship, it should be irrelevant to interpersonal relationships if the servant has beliefs or values that

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[147] Indeed, this 'folk' response is perhaps the more appropriate definition in this context. It is taken from *Wikipedia*, an open-source Internet encyclopaedia that can be updated and its information immediately contested. It can, thus, reflect the term's usage and the attitudes of the general public.

are in opposition to those of their 'master' or dominant culture. To "unnecessarily accommodate" is therefore to 'Uncle Tom' – to attempt to please, by way of conformity, the master or majority. The LGBTQ equivalent of 'Uncle Tomming' would be to abstain from homosexual activity, as this is theoretically the source of the 'dominant' heterosexual culture's displeasure.

Moreover, to 'Uncle Tom' in a homosexual context suggests the attempt to feign 'heterosexual' appearance and behaviour. The suggestion that there is a predefined 'heterosexual' appearance presupposes that there is also a homosexual appearance and manner, albeit one that can be hidden, should the homosexual choose to 'Uncle Tom'. As 'Uncle Tomming' is seen as a sign of subservience, to overtly display – or refuse to hide – homosexual behaviour is to challenge its oppression by forcing heterosexual mainstream culture to acknowledge it and, therefore, come to terms with its implications.

Whether or not there is an objective and specifically 'homosexual appearance', there is the acceptance of a conceptual homosexual 'manner' and style amongst LGBTQ people, as can be seen from the comments of the respondents in this thesis (Rose 2006). In lesbians, this takes the form of what social stereotypes consider to be a masculine manner, while in males it is conceived as a marked effeminacy. Camp is one aspect of this manner, and is particularly associated with males, as Andy Medhurst comments (1997). Although camp is considered by the respondents to manifest naturally when the individual is in certain circumstances, such as a state of emotional excitement, respondents Davey and Rose have suggested it is hyperbolised to function as a consciously performed indicator of

homosexuality (Rose 2006).[148] Taken to its extreme, this performance of homosexual identity becomes drag, as it is generally the representation of opposite biological sex.

It is, therefore, no surprise that drag has played a part in political discourse as a signifier of LGBTQ challenges to oppression. The most famous incidence of this is the Stonewall Inn riot in 1969: drag queens, transvestites and other LGBTQ identified patrons defended the venue against a police raid.[149] The rioters symbolised the communities' demand of the legal right and social acceptance to dress as they wanted and to have sexual relations with whom they pleased. As a result, they were adopted as figureheads of the LGBTQ movement. The following year, the community staged the first parade aiming to raise awareness of LGBTQ issues, performing in drag as a means to make their identity recognisable enough to convey their cause.

The use of a staged event to attempt to reappraise the social structures and beliefs of society by placing those in subjugated roles in the position of power that is the open street is reminiscent of the medieval carnival as described by Francois Rabelais and critiqued by Mikhail Bakhtin (Iswolsky 1984). This chapter will now demonstrate how the LGBTQ community has utilised the carnivals to convey a critique of heterosexist sex and gender roles in order to then illustrate how the figure of the drag queen can be viewed as a metaphor through which carnival participants can reconceptualise their own sexual perception.

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[148] See Chapter One of this study for further discussion of this topic.
[149] Whether the rioters would have identified themselves as female impersonators or transsexuals is largely conjecture. That they were cross-dressed in comparison to their birth sex is the relevance of the event.

LGBTQ Pride events such as the Manchester and Wakefield celebrations of 2006 are predominantly performed in public spaces and encourage the participation of the non-LGBTQ community through the provision of entertainment such as dance and music. The floats in the procession reflect issues specific to the LGBTQ community, such as the provision of non-discriminatory health care and advocacy services, but they also incorporate organisations reflecting more generalised concerns, such as leisure facilities.

It must be noted, however, that the geographical settings of the Manchester and Wakefield Pride festivals radically alter their presentation, politics and cultural dynamics. This is firstly due to the factors that differentiate their comparative sizes. In 2001, Wakefield had an urban area of 2,062 hectares and a population of 76,886 (*Office of National Statistics*, npg.). Manchester, in contrast, had an urban area of 55,843 hectares and a population of 2,244,931 people (Ibid.). Manchester is roughly twenty-eight times the size of Wakefield, when considering the average discrepancies between the population and the space they inhabit. Manchester has far more people to serve. They, consequently, fulfil the probability that the cities users will hold a wide range of social views and perspectives. This diversity facilitates the connection of like-minded individuals, which leads to increased involvement from political and community groups (such as the Grannies who will be discussed in due course) in the festivals.

The high population also results in increased diversity of festival attractions. Aside from the event's culmination at the world-famous 'gay village' around Canal Street, the festival is of sufficient size to entice a sizeable market with traders selling an array of lifestyle goods ranging from sex aids to magazines, while the lavish, main parade lasts for around forty-five minutes. Indeed, the lavishness of the parade was probably the marked difference

between the Manchester and Wakefield festivals. Manchester's parade featured a range of performers dressed in extravagant costumes representing both LGBTQ and heterosexual-owned' businesses, and the cost of participation illustrates the impact the traders project the advertising may have generating interest and loyalty in their businesses.

Furthermore, the Manchester event is important in terms of LGBTQ political visibility. The audience lining the parade route are generally around seven people deep, and it was impossible to follow the parade through the density of the crowd. As a result, many stood with friends and bought merchandise such as rainbow coloured flags and whistles from the wandering vendors, thus contributing directly to the festival's appearance as a political event, suggesting the entire locality's pride in the LGBTQ community.

Wakefield Pride was altogether a different affair. While Wakefield is classed as a city, its smaller population and geographical area leads to a comparative lack of personal diversity amongst its residents, ergo a comparative lack of facilities for non-mainstream cultural groups. It is set amongst a cluster of areas in Yorkshire that are anecdotally known for their traditional views, and although it could partly be attributed to the weather, comparatively few well-wishers watched the parade pass by. This lack of local priority could also be seen in the parade itself. Only the few, local, LGBTQ-owned or orientated businesses and organisations were in attendance, and most walked rather than travelling on lorries, as was the case in Manchester. The market consisted of a few stalls providing health advice and one selling pink cowboy hats. However, despite this subdued scale, the Wakefield event was in some ways the more political as a result of these geographical differences. The lack of people involved facilitated an intimacy that encouraged those in the parade to talk to strangers and to onlookers – something that wasn't witnessed by the researcher at the

Manchester event. Furthermore, Wakefield Pride was a relaxed affair whose size facilitated the consolidation of the city's comparatively small LGBTQ community, while the Manchester event was far more able as a result of its scale to target particular services to specific segments - political or otherwise – of the local LGBTQ community.

However, these Pride events were not solely concerned with interaction with the LGBTQ population. Outreach has become a further political function of Pride. It expands the event's remit by appealing to the entire community to advocate the popular mainstream concepts of self-acceptance and the individual's justification to seek personal happiness and fulfilment, rather than emphasizing more traditional goals of financial security and developing the nuclear family. One method through which this outreach takes place is drag. There is a popular understanding of the use of clothing to indicate and question gender norms and social codes, as has been discussed with reference to Judith Butler (1993) in Chapter One. Kate Bornstein has also developed the concept as a methodology to facilitate personal discovery (1994). A drag queen signifies this ideal as a representation of personal fulfilment through performance and the disavowal of the stereotypes of the nuclear family, such as anticipated gender roles and social functions.

As has been stated, drag queens became symbolic of the LGBTQ Pride movement due to The Stonewall Riot and its aftermath. They connote such aspects of the internal communities' history through their presence within the social circuit (see particularly Cole 2000 and Kirk and Heath 1984), as well as having been the 'acceptable' face of LGBTQ culture in the mainstream as a result of performers such as Kenny Everett.[150] Drag queens'

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[150] Performers such as Graham Norton are not part of this tradition as their advent is far more recent. Although performers such as Danny La Rue (1987) did not publicly self-identify as homosexual during his

use of performative gestures and highly colourful, visually arresting clothing features prominently in the festivities. The impact of these attributes highlights and questions the representation of gender identity and the potential mutability of sex-role conventions by drawing attention to the discrepancy between the drag queens' biology and the image they project.

This facility to question normally accepted ideation is a primary focus of the carnival, particularly in its modern form (Presdee 2000). Indeed, Mikhail Bakhtin posits that the representation of the body is essential to understanding the regenerative aspect of the carnival (Iswolsky 1984). It is, therefore, imperative to understand the implications of a male body representing a female form in this event. Mary Russo's arguments concerning the construction of femininity and its taboos (1997) will demonstrate, via Bakhtin's theories of the grotesque conception of the body, how the drag queens' dual nature as a man/woman establishes them as a metaphorical doorway that enables all carnival participants to be reborn into a world of identities and sexualities.

To theorise a male taking on a female guise within a LGBTQ carnival obviously raises a number of theoretical questions regarding how their representation affects the role they play in the proceedings. Their performance of femininity must be examined. The performers self-identify by two primary categories: drag queens and female impersonators. Thesis respondent Kerryn Davey considers drag queens to be comic figures who do not aim towards a 'realistic' representation of femaleness. She argues that female impersonators, as the name suggests, aim to present a more lifelike portrayal. However, female impersonators

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main period of public popularity, his willingness to cross-dress as a glamorous female shows he does fit within this cross-gendered image, particularly as he always appeared in male garb at the end of his performances.

display a framework of glamorous, high femininity, and are not a representation of women within normative cultural circumstances.

In "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory", Russo draws attention to Lacan's theorisation that the desires of masculinity define femininity and, thus, the female's social role (Russo 1997). Therefore, Russo contends that the defining factor of femininity is inhabiting the mindset and experience of "Womanness" as that which is desired (Russo 1997 320). This may explain drag queens' representation of the female as a vision of high-femininity, or that to which a male would be attracted. Drag queen Anna Glypta, who performed on a float at the Manchester carnival 2006, is evidence of such a representation. Her costume was left partially open to reveal an alluring black brassiere that drew attention to the desirability of the feminised body. However, if the representation of femininity is the costume's purpose, it is important to consider why Anna Glypta and other drag queens remain the focus of the LGBTQ carnival, rather than performers who appeared to be female impersonators or bio queens.

Russo suggests that the difficulty of female representation is that its indicators, the procreative objects of the uterus and vagina, are hidden. Therefore, the display of femininity highlights female attributes that are visible when fully attired, particularly the breasts, as they denote the body beneath the clothing. The implication is profoundly gender normative and is in an environment that is not normally an LGBTQ 'space'; female impersonators and bio queens who closely resemble normative femininity could instead connote heterosexuality and, thus, heterosexualise the atmosphere (Walker 1993). Therefore, drag queens' bodies are feminised without completely replicating stereotypical concepts of feminine desirability. In Anna Glypta's case, this could be seen from her wig

and slightly tight costume that accentuates and thus signifies, rather than disguises, her stocky, male figure (Constantine and Woodall 2004). The attempt to show the iconography of desirability whilst disrupting the image with signifiers that do not comply with an appropriate stereotype actually combines to suggest an inherent lack of femininity. It in fact inverts Russo's theory as the external appearance of 'breasts' does not denote the sexual organs. This, in turn, reflects Anna Glypta's male biology. The imagery of her costume suggests metamorphosis rather than stasis in the body, which is, in turn, accentuated by the carnival as an event that changes everyday surroundings. Russo asserts that bodily organs are an aspect of female power (as opposed to submission), and are connected to a redeployment of taboos of aging, pregnancy and the "irregular" body (1997 320). Referencing, and indeed utilising, these female taboos enables the drag queen's body to become a metaphor for metamorphosis, as well as the process through which it can occur.

The notion of the carnivalesque body as one that can change and outgrow the parameters of the individual, a process that will initially impact upon the performer, is a central theory of Mikhail Bakhtin (Iswolsky 1984). According to his thesis, the grotesque body both physically and metaphorically connects to the metaphorical eternal human body and the physical world via the orifices, such as the mouth and anus, the latter being an example of what Bakhtin terms the "lower stratum" (Iswolsky 1984 309). Both the mouth and the anus are important when studying the figure of the drag queen in a LGBTQ parade or carnival scenario. Their role and position in the proceedings can be compared to Bakhtin's example of degradation and regeneration as depicted by the episode of Harlequin and the stutterer found in the commedia dell'arte (Iswolsky 1984). In Bakhtin's example, the stutterer attempts to vocalise a word, or idea, but only succeeds after the word is pushed from his abdomen, and is born through his mouth. In the case of the drag queen, the concept (or

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recognition) of homosexuality is made physical through articulation of the anus, the primary orifice through which male homosexual intercourse is enacted, and with which it is associated. However, as its penetration cannot result in procreation, the concept is 'born' or announced instead by vocal passage, following the force provided by the sexual assistance of the Fool-Hero, or other sexual partner, or as Bakhtin puts it:[151]

> We further see the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum. The word is localised in the mouth and in the head (thought); from there it is transferred to the abdomen and is pushed out under the impact... (Iswolsky 1984 309)

Where the stutterer enacts the gestures of childbirth, the drag queen demonstrates femininity through the historical role of the hysterical female, equally shouting and waving in sexual ecstasy.[152] Indeed, one is left with the distinct impression that Rabelais himself would be amused by the reapplication of the image, so clearly does it demonstrate the qualities of the material bodily principle!

Thus, the drag queen's image represents both homosexual desire and connotations of the female aspects of reproduction. Our theorised drag queen has just given birth to the identification of her desire. However, it is essential at this point to remember a differentiation between the drag queen and the characters described by Bakhtin. The drag queen, although part of the eternal body of humanity, is nevertheless separated from the holism of the majority through her placement in a minority community event. Her vocalisation of the concept of homosexuality is expressed within the confines of her

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[151] It cannot be overlooked that the image of the Fool-Hero described in Chapter Two has a similar dramatic function to Harlequin himself.

[152] Indeed, Russo notes that the depiction of hysteria has historically been used as semiotic shorthand for femininity (Russo 1997). See also Bakhtin's interpretation of the masquerading men dressed as women in his chapter entitled "Popular-Festive Forms and Images in Rabelais", pp. 196-277 (Iswolsky 1984).

relationship with mainstream society, in which she is subjugated. On her own, albeit with the assistance of Bakhtin's theory of the lower stratum, she may not have sufficient 'rhetoric' to convince an external audience of the cultural importance of her exclamation in challenging heterosexism.

It is, therefore, necessary to consider how she impacts on the rest of the carnival and, indeed, can be a manifestation of the everyman figure. For this it is necessary to consider Bakhtin's concept of loophole wording: "the penultimate word [that] places after itself only a conditional, not a final period" that "evokes the potential for the new in all utterances" (Morson 1986 ix) of which the drag queen's exclamation is a prime example. Loophole wording remains as an expression, rather than a complete statement, and is, therefore, opposed to the authoritarian word that encourages no further dialogue. It indicates discovery without the implication that it contains the sum total of that what is possible. It highlights its own production through the possibility of the encounter and demands a response to its very utterance. Importantly, it also sets the scene for this response to be celebratory and permissive, as in this instance, the force used to gain it is pleasurable.

The response must come from the people, and is dependent on their recognition of its mode of production through the body of the drag queen as a signifier of gender discourse. The carnival switches the audience's focus from the existing systems and beliefs of mainstream society, as represented by high-street shops and monuments such as churches, to the event as a whole. This is the first stage of a process that enables cultural degradation and regeneration, as depicted by Bakhtin's concept of the carnival's social levelling aspect as that which unites the carnival-goers as the physical body of humanity (Iswolsky 1984). The participants are the next focus as they represent differing behaviours and dramas, but as the

process of degradation demands that each successive layer of the system is reduced from the top, the spectacle then concentrates on the drag or carnival queen, as the symbol of authority (Iswolsky 1984). However, on the body of a male who is not attempting a normative impersonation of a woman, the image becomes partly comic, a concept that gives rise to accusations of misogyny (hooks 1992).

This chapter suggests that the aim of the drag queen is not to represent a 'normal' woman, but in part, to draw attention to the varying gender signifiers of her costume by use of comedy and the shock value of taboo. As Russo comments, liminal women are categorised as either being old or young, innocent or experienced (1997). Drag queens can be classified in the same way: those who represent the young and attractive demonstrate the anticipation of experience; and those who do not conform to socially accepted standards of beauty as they have become voluptuous as a result of their experience.[153]

Anna Glypta's appearance is sexual, yet comic. She wears a feminine, pink, nurse's outfit on a generously proportioned figure that does not comply with the modern ideal of femininity. She also wears what is obviously a blonde wig. Applied to a man/woman, the degradation principle reveals, via satire, the instability of the two sexes and the social roles expected of them. As a result, the viewer looks for other signs, such as the face and figure, to establish the performer's biological sex. The spectacle of this figure, therefore, further degrades the audience's focus from the concept of each person as a single intellectual unit, to each person as lower body stratum and, thus, part of the body of human kind. Thus, the levelling is complete as the similarities between the drag queen and the other carnival

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[153] As is represented by image of the woman in the bottom centre of the frontispiece of *Rabelais and His World* (Iswolsky 1984).

attendees, regardless of sexual identity, are made the point of focus. The viewers'
acceptance of the levelling aspect of the lower body stratum signifies the understanding of
the drag queen's loophole word utterance. The external appearance does not necessarily
denote the physical body, and, therefore, questions whether the body matter truly indicates
all physical or emotional functionality.

Bakhtin's theory of the lower body stratum can, therefore, be adapted to question the notion
that biological and sexual imperatives are based on external appearance. Indeed, this notion
of the grotesque bodily principle actively reconfigures the cultural setting itself. The
landscape becomes emblematic of the carnivalesque sexual atmosphere. This was
particularly the case with the commentary box at Manchester Pride, which was positioned
in front of the cathedral, and, thus, the religion that is associated with the arguments of
biologism is transformed to become the symbolic altar of the new order of the
carnivalesque sexuality:

> It uncrowns the entire monastery, the very ground on which it stands, its false
> ascetic ideal, its abstract and sterile eternity. The belfry's shadow is the shadow
> of the phallus that generates new life. (Iswolsky 1984 312)

Unlike the Bakhtinian example, however, the church-phallus does not only metaphorically
impregnate the biological woman, but instead all those whose genders had been 'queered'
within the carnival space as a result of the degradation and bodily grotesque principles. In
turn, it can also metaphorically impregnate the external world through the parties'
interactions, as they are also joined to it as "[the] limits between the body and the physical
world are weakened", as per carnival theorem (Iswolsky 1984 313).

As the drag queen represents a metaphorical man/woman who demonstrates the instability of sex and gender, this thesis will now demonstrate the importance of the drag queen's conceptual womb for the other carnival participants. As Russo states, the womb represents the liminal space of the body where the two bodies of the mother and the child can co-exist (1997). As the drag queen does not physically have a womb, it is necessary to question what, if anything, is incubated and produced. As Hocquengham has suggested, "there is a spontaneous sexualisation of all relationships with a homosexual" (Dangoor 1993 55), this being particularly the case at an LGBTQ Pride event! Therefore, at this stage, it is essential to ascertain how the sexual act and its outcome relate to the LGBTQ couple. While lesbian and gay sexual intercourse is not performed for procreation, the combined man/woman drag queen (symbolic of LGBTQ culture) suggests that sodomy can be a method of sexual production; the products are, therefore, faeces and sperm. In this purely pleasurable context, sperm is transformed from its conceptualisation as the unnecessary excess remaining from impregnation, to the celebratory evidence of a successful union. Furthermore, though faeces is a waste product, it is also a fertiliser and, therefore, a provider of life. It is, not surprisingly, a Rabelaisian object that Bakhtin asserts acts as the final stage of degradation, as well as a facilitator of subsequent renewal (Iswolsky 1984). Both sperm and faeces are ideologically recycled as signifiers of the production and ratification of a newly recognised and consummated relationship that has produced effects.

The physical faeces and sperm alluded to by the presence of the LGBTQ drag queen are not simply a 'child', or the personification of the drag queen's self and relationship, but a loophole-word concept. It is in this context that the masculine side of the drag queen, or man/woman, is brought into play. The body fluids referred to through the possibility of

orgasm in a same-sex relationship become the metaphorical seed that establishes new birth in the community, literally by announcing the benefits of participation to new bodies to invite them to join the society and enable its membership to grow. The drag queen gives metaphorical life to these new bodies by extending permission to join, and reminding them that, within the carnival, they can experiment with their experience of the self and body with others. Presdee (2000) has highlighted this as a feature of the festival, particularly in modern times. The carnival provides a method of gaining such experience from, and is a showcase for, the LGBTQ community. It plays music to attract the attention of the crowds and encourages their involvement through dancing. The music is beat-based as opposed to melodic, and reflects the night clubs that are a fixture of the LGBTQ social scene As Presdee comments in "Rave and Criminalisation of Youth", dancing to such music affects the body in a manner akin to trance:

> Carnival places the body in a trance-like state where, like the carnival of rave, one can 'play with one's body and carry out a state of enthusiasm…' (Jeanmaire 1951:58) which takes the people not only out of their bodies but in doing so out of society and into the state of ecstasy. (Presdee 2000 40)

This requires redefinition of the concept of "[playing] with one's body" to gain a "state of ecstasy" (Ibid). While this phrase can be understood literally to mean masturbating oneself to the point of orgasm, one suspects that Presdee does not intend to suggest that this is the primary goal of attending a carnival! The suggestion is, rather, "playing" or experimenting with movement to experience the body and the different physical feelings that denote 'being', whether through the realisation of movement possible through dance, or the theoretical connotations of the body's ability to transcend one fixed form.

Presdee's quotation of Jeanmaire's term "trance" also has religious connotations, particularly of possession by external forces (*OED Online*, accessed 18th November 2006). This possession is the process of the impregnation of ideation, in this case sexual due to the framing of the narrative in the carnival. However, it is important to recognise that the carnivalesque concept places importance on the aesthetic of the unfinished. As Holquist comments:

> The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (in Iswolsky 1984 19)

Just as the material bodily principle posits that the body is in a state of constant evolution, so is the nature of humanity as a loophole-worded concept. Russo comments how Kristeva places the liminality of the image of the pregnant woman in the relationship between mother and child in the birthing scene (1997). In this, the child emerges from the uterus, the site of the foetus' development, and, therefore, the site of the growth of the people for which the carnival ground is a metaphor. Just as the physical child develops within the mother but matures without being an exact replica, so too does the LGBTQ community 'child' develop in the style of the drag queen's imagery, but without dogmatic imprint. However, the physicality of the drag queen alone does not enable this cultural rebirthing: the child must develop for itself.

The concept of developing within, or exploring this site "where meaning collapses" (Russo 1997 326), that is the difficulty of determining the point at which mother and child become

two separate entities, also reflects further definitions of the term "trance" as a site of rapture, ecstasy, and, indeed, terror (*OED Online*, accessed 19th November 2006). This is particularly the case as the drag queen is an LGBTQ symbol operating within a community that is 'queered' primarily for the duration of the carnival. Thus, the exploration of "flayed identity" as that which is expansive and "[fantastical]" (Russo 1997 326) indicates an unknown and unseen, the discovery of which is no small task. Indeed, as Russo recounts, the moment of birth into new identity is described by Kristeva as not pure pleasure, but as

> [Something] horrible to see at the impossible doors of the invisible [the] scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual…
> (Russo 1997 326-327)

This is the final stage of the degradation and renewal process. The image of the drag queen mother enables the rebirthing of the suggestion of the sexual in the minds of the participants. The final deposal of previously held ideas is demonstrated by the realisation that the drag queen is enabling a new generation, regardless of their previous sexual identification, for, as Halberstam comments: "it is possible […] to create new genders and to graft them on to old bodies with powerful results" (2000 165). As a symbolic mother, the drag queen's remaining task is to provide a metaphorical representation of the maternal instinct, a space in which the old – or previous – conception of the individual becomes a child and explores its new body and begins to develop community relations. The drag queens, as part of LGBTQ community, present the carnival as a physical yet liminal nursery that facilitates the participants' childlike play with sexuality.

Furthermore, the concept of carnivalesque liminality enables the drag queen to facilitate the cultural physical rebirthing of the participant into the LGBTQ community. In the Wakefield and Manchester Prides, which are based in town centres, the involvement of the non-LGBTQ community is encouraged. The event takes place on the main thoroughfare and, therefore, commandeers the space for the duration. Indeed, at Manchester Pride the roads are closed to non-carnival traffic, which reinforces the importance of the event and the performers within it. As a result, anyone who enters the locale is implicitly called to join the event as the vast crowds can make passage practically impossible. The pedestrian is thrust into the carnival atmosphere.

As a result of this disruption of the normal setting, the carnival performers become the centre of attention. They gain an increased level of status as those able to transform the commercial street, a symbol of work and economy, into a liminal space where ludic activities take precedence, and, therefore, effectively over-ride the entire socio-economic structure. This status places them in the position of carnival role models as they are both an expression of the variety of human sexualities, and, as a result of their joyful participation in the event, a demonstration of the positive effects of celebrating sexuality. Thus, they encourage the other participants to reappraise and celebrate their own sexual identity. The procession performers engage with the crowd through vocal and physical greetings, while the floats play music to encourage dancing, and street vendors sell LGBTQ memorabilia (such as rainbow whistles and flags) that can be used to add to the festive atmosphere.[154] The crowd are, thus, invited to become co-opted into the carnival performance celebrating LGBTQ life rather than merely watching the procession.

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[154] The pride flag was conceived by drag performer Gilbert Baker to "call the gay movement to action" (*Rainbow25*, npg.).

The participants can use the event to challenge their own perceptions of sexuality by considering the sexualities of others that are on display.[155] As Presdee comments, the participant may not be aware of the sexualities of the other participants (Presdee 2000). This is particularly the case when there is a mixture of participants wearing gender normative clothing and those whose appearance actively connotes LGBTQ identity. Their reaction will, in part, be determined by the behaviour of others in the crowd as indicators of the prevalent social norm, in this case LGBTQ, and their decision of whether to comply with it. By engaging in the ludic carnival process, each participant can improvise and develop their act or persona within the festival. They are given licence to invent their own performances as honorary LGBTQ citizens and can use the space to experiment with new ideas and modes of behaviour in order to fit in with their surroundings. The carnival, after all, provides a holiday atmosphere where the usual rules of civility are relaxed. Indeed, following the rebirthing process facilitated by the drag queen, each participant is effectively exalted to become a vessel for the development of their perception of the festive godhead. Therefore, through their communication with other members of the parade, a communion of sorts is achieved that encourages the formulation of new discoveries of identity.

The interaction between general public and the established LGBTQ community during the Pride Carnivals holds other implications for the event's liminal identity. Regardless of individually held conceptions of sexual identity, participation in the event works as a frame that places all identities in a relationship with the notion of queering. While the rebirthing facilitated by the drag queen focuses the mind of the individual on the concept of sexuality,

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[155] In a manner similar to Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, in which participants challenge their social perceptions whilst viewing the display of the performers, see Jackson (1998).

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this does not mean that all participants are themselves queered beyond the carnival's parameters. However, their continued involvement following this process demonstrates their support of the event, and, as a result, each participant performs the role of the activist by trumpeting the carnival's concept. Indeed, their participation in the event effectively queers how onlookers perceive them, which in turn affects the way in which the carnival itself is perceived as a celebration of LGBTQ identity.

As a result, the carnival itself becomes the formulation of the perception of LGBTQ identities as encompassing a variety of other ways of 'being', in addition to those behavioural formulas suggested by the standard sexuality categorisation. It is, therefore, imperative to consider whether the non-LGBTQ participants alter the perception, ethos and outcome of the event. As Bakhtin (Iswolsky 1984) posits, thought is formulated via human interaction, which suggests that the addition of non-LGBTQ participants adds a multifaceted 'voice of the people' to the event, which may actually develop its meaning (Holquist 1984). The event becomes a fluid celebration of sexuality in general.

In this context, it is also important to consider the impact this has on the ideal of the carnival as a vehicle to further the issues of the LGBTQ community. Its progression is not so much that of the LGBTQ community, but that of a community willing to countenance the notion of potential pansexuality and set this broader interpretation of sexuality against heterosexist norms. In this sense, the carnival is truly revolutionary as it temporarily dissolves the boundary between the two groups so that it can spread its message. The groups can then reorganise together within broader sexual identities to enable the reappraisal of the mainstream culture through the Bakhtinian thought expression (loophole words).

However, the carnival can also reconfigure the LGBTQ community in non-liminal time. As the LGBTQ carnival is also a reflection of an existing community, the introduction of new members within this queered frame impacts on the dialogue as authored by its hosts. When one joins such an event, the image projected will, as has been stated, be formulated in keeping with the social norms presented at the time. However, internalising this image through the thought process necessary to immerse oneself in these social norms creates a modified community identity that will impact on the LGBTQ group's perception of what has been forcibly embodied for the carnival. The image will be reflected back to the performers themselves. This reflected identity challenges the host's original sense of self, as, following Roland Barthes' theories (1981), it constitutes a snapshot of the stable identity to ensure that the alteration occurring during carnival time will force the image's re-evaluation. While mimicking the manner in which academic criticism develops ideation, it is also a carnivalesque concept, as Booth comments: "I can say only what I *can* say, and that will be largely what I have learned to say from the kings I would depose" (1986 147). The carnival incorporates the deposal of participants in authority which indicates that another aim of the event is the evolution of individuals so that they present sexualities that are developed in light of carnivalesque ideals.

However, if we are to consider the carnival participants as those who use it to reveal universal truths, as Bakhtin (Iswolsky 1984) suggests, it is necessary to consider whether continual deposition develops further knowledge that can be used within the non-carnival sphere, or simply reinforces that which has already been ratified. This is the difference between the ideation of the potential diversity of identity, and the factual scenario with its

subsequent understandings revealed through living the ramifications of the new identity (for instances see Queen and Schimel 1997). Indeed, the further development of notions of identity becomes fraught as their entire theorisation becomes subjective and, at times, transient, as Van Meter indicates (1996). There can be no authorisation of the limits of such identities, as the carnival host must recognise the effect of the very liminality he has installed. As Bernstein comments, "a 'wise fool' [cannot] be judged with any confidence by himself, his interlocutor, or even the dislodged readers" (Bernstein 1986 110).

The judgement certainly cannot be made in the unfinished, carnivalesque reality. Particularly in the world of the LGBTQ event, the identities 'played' reflect the participants' lives in the non-liminal time frame. While these non-liminal identities can also be ludic, existing in what Halberstam calls "queer time" defined by the social structure in which the identity is performed (2005), the potential for the loss of judgement is hyperbolised in the carnival as the identity is played out for the event's benefit to demonstrate the qualities of the fool (or Fool-Hero) who critiques 'the world turned upside down'. The wisdom of the Fool-Hero is contested and temporal as the demarcation between personal conceptualisation of identity, temporal or not, and the feigned identity of festival madness is blurred and overlapped. This places the LGBTQ celebrant in a quandary strikingly similar to the notion of the Abject Hero:

> With the addition of the theme of intermittent madness and the burden of an exacerbated self-consciousness, a further turn of the screw in the text's ambiguity is inevitable. Now the question is no longer restricted to the choice between a strictly comic or serious argument, nor is it resolved by the sleight of hand of labelling the work as a 'comic' presentation of essentially serious themes […] Instead all of these modes coexist in the discourse of a character who is himself at a loss to know which response is appropriate, a figure whose speech lacks all of the customary contextual cues separating an articulation according to its degree of truth, folly, or humour, but whose own familiarity

with the expectations of the satiric genre makes him long in vain for some stable reference point against which to measure his outbursts. (Bernstein 1986 111-112)

Bernstein's words denote the performers' tension with the ambiguity that their performed recognition that their own gender manifestation is a construct, and that their exhibition of gender is satirical social commentary.

However, as a result of the interplay between queer time (Halberstam 2005) identity and liminal carnival identity, the image presented at the event can convey some of the connotations of the very identity it aims to identify. The "outbursts" (Bernstein 1986 112) can, thus, disguise any potential development there is. For example, respondent Anna Glypta performs as a flamboyant drag queen in a costume that may be perceived as harbouring misogynistic perspectives. The character is overtly sexual, yet not stereotypically attractive, and is performed with a hint of camp, indicated by a forced high-pitched voice, suggesting femininity as not only a construct, but one which the character as performed fails to understand. This view is a direct misconception of the aim of the performer, who in fact utilises the image to enact his desire to be female, as he considers his physique would negate from the possibility of passing as a woman, even given the prospect of transition surgery (Rayne 2006a). Indeed, in this respect, the carnival laughter, rather than being purely regenerative, also carries the connotation of hysteria (Bernstein 1986). This erupts from the violence of the emotions that may be faced within the liminal atmosphere that violently opposes cultural norms, and the participant who "[…] can no longer be certain whether he is really identifiable as a 'wise fool', whether he is merely imitating one for his own conscious ends, or whether he is trapped within an impersonation he can neither fully assume nor entirely shake off' (1986 112).

This process envelops all of the carnival's participants. Despite its potential drawbacks in negating the ability to ratify new categorisations (or transgressions thereof), the carnival nevertheless enables the community's development. A definition of liminality indeed suggests that such uncertainty must be developed before any new realisations can occur: "Every stimulus must reach a certain intensity before any appreciable sensation results. This point is known as the threshold or liminal intensity" (*OED Online*, accessed 28th October 2006). The stimulus in this case is the liminal play of the carnival. The stages of "liminality" are defined as "throwing off of old identity, liminal stage between identities, re-emergence on the other side" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, accessed 28th October 2006). This definition refers particularly to religious orders, and sure enough, should the participant choose to use the carnival to re-evaluate their identity and bring the development into the non-liminal time, they can, as a starting point, interpret the proliferation of images on parade as the carnivals' clergy - the state to which the novice aspires.

Many of the performers can be categorised as two broad visual types: drag and clone, which are then further divided into sub-categories. Within the drag category there are drag queens and female impersonators, while the clone – all of whose participants dress largely identically – represents special interest groups, such as club dancers and motorcyclists. The carnival mirror into which one looks to adapt to new notions of identity represents a figure, rather than a kaleidoscope of different images. Assuming the personal circumstances and identifications of the performers are unknown to the onlooker, there is precious little to tell each apart, save those whose displays are more visually arresting.

It is, therefore, interesting that the liminal ritual facilitates the individuals' passage from one state of being to another:

> In the widespread ritual re-enactment of death and rebirth, initiates are ceremonially "killed" to remove them from their former life, treated as infants in the transitional period, and made to mature into their new status. Successful passage of ordeals form a regular feature of the transitional requirements, and doorways are often used to signify entry into the new domain. The new status is usually indicated by some alteration of the body (*e.g.*, circumcision, removal of teeth, tattooing and scarification, dressing of the hair, etc.) or by the addition of special clothing and ornaments. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, accessed 28th October 2006)

In the carnival, participation constitutes the ceremonial killing, as involvement represents estrangement from previous self-conception. However, costume's implications are also important in the rite:

> Social systems require a certain amount of equilibrium in order to function smoothly. Changes in either individuals or groups threaten to disrupt this equilibrium. The primary sociological function of rites of passage, then, is to foster the achievement of a new state of equilibrium after such changes, to restore social order and thereby maintain the society as a system of congruent parts. A rite of passage, being a dramatization of the individual's entry into the new order, characteristically provides instruction and gives assurance of the mastery of a new role to the affected individual. It also serves as an opportunity for the community to demonstrate support of its constituents. (Ibid)

As a result, the range of costumes on display indicate the roles into which the viewer can ease themselves in order not to unduly disturb the equilibrium (some disturbance is necessary and unavoidable). To develop this role further requires participation in the culture itself, away from the carnival proper. Indeed the floats and costumes also serve the function of easing the process of integration into LGBTQ lifestyle:

> According to some interpretations, these rites serve to bridge critical stages in the life process and to help the individual confront certain uncontrollable aspects of the world he inhabits. By providing a predictable, communal context for individual experience, rites of passage act psychotherapeutically to alleviate the inevitable anxiety that accompanies change. (Ibid)

This is achieved by placing the carnival in the context of the normal world. The majority of the performers are allied to floats representing commercial and community-based enterprises that provide a point of safe departure for the viewer. They represent aspirational aspects of mainstream culture that are prevalent in LGBTQ society, and which also provide an already existing set of social choices such as attending LGBTQ forums, social groups and health-care facilities. The idea recalls Twitchell's arguments that "entertainment [or in this case lifestyle] becomes its own liturgy" (1992 259). The LGBTQ carnivals present a world offering protection in the workplace through sexuality-specific Union leaflets, fulfilling relationships via the Civil Ceremonies float, and a lively social life as promised by a large majority of the remaining floats. Similarly, many of the costumes on show are only subtly different to those already imprinted on the minds of the participants through popular culture, which Twitchell suggests removes "audience doubt and anxiety" (1992 189). To attend a carnival with recognisable images invites inspection, while their very differences from the norm promote further investigation as a result of our natural inquisitiveness.

The converse aspects of the definition of parade as masquerade are also part of the carnival, particularly when considering the distinction between the experiences of the carnival felt by the non-LGBTQ onlooker and the LGBTQ procession participant. As Bakhtin's theory suggests:

> [Carnival] doesn't know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it […] It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. (Iswolsky 1984 7)

There is some truth in the above statement, particularly at the Manchester carnival where safety barriers separate the crowd from the performers in the procession, thus forming a highly visible 'footlight' that disrupts audience involvement in the event and creates a sense of difference between them and the self-identified LGBTQ performers on the floats.[156] Although this can detract from a holistic carnivalesque feel in the Bakhtinian sense, modern physical and social structures have facilitated a way in which the carnival can be experienced by both the participants in the procession and in the crowd.

As Montgomery states, in the Rabelaisian carnival, the road (as the path of the carnival) represents a familiar territory. Any actions that occur may change the territory, but those who transverse it remain largely unchanged (1993). This is not, however, to say that the carnival viewers are playing a role that can be simply discarded. Indeed, the Rabelaisian notion of the carnivalesque road is "the central chronotope in the chivalric romance, the romantic novel and the picaresque novel"[157] (Montgomery 1993 15). The carnival does not change the participants, but instead facilitates the realisation of their LGBTQ sexuality if required. As Presdee comments, the "carnival has shattered and its fragments and debris are

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[156] The Manchester parade could be joined on payment of a £50 fee; a practice that organisations such as QueerKafferia have suggested is divisive and exclusionary.

[157] The chronotope is defined as "the co-ordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative; in other words to the 'setting', considered as a spatio-temporal whole" by *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms Online* (accessed 12th June 2008).

now to be found in a wide range of contemporary forms…" (2000 45), one of which is modern LGBTQ culture. This is geographically located in both the Wakefield and the Manchester parades where the routes culminate at the LGBTQ public houses that can be utilised after the event. However, as Morson suggests, "[agreement] is never identity. It always presupposes or becomes the occasion for differences…", regardless of whether the individual is a part of the procession or not (Morson 1986 2). Liminal play in these environments ceases as the physical community impacts on the behaviours that can be performed, as the durability of the space ensures all actions and interactions have real-time ramifications that become part of the communities' relationship history. They do, however, offer a different conceptualisation of what Halberstam has called "queer time" and "queer space", which refigure notions of spatial awareness to enable the development of sexualities after the cessation of the festivities (2005).

As has been demonstrated, carnivalesque liminality can exist in modern times in the context of the LGBTQ community's Pride events. The carnivalesque laughter facilitates the participants' experiments with their personal concepts of sexuality, or their "own sense of judgement and values", as Bernstein puts it (1986 106). This is as opposed to Geertz's suggestion of experiencing the event as simply a jolly occasion in which internal fantasies may be temporarily experienced (Presdee 2000), or indeed inventing such fantasies for the purpose of participating in the event. As Morson comments, understanding depends on the prior preparation of the individuals' anticipated response (1986). If the individual perceives the carnival and its performers as a shallow satire of the dominant culture, their only gratification can be intellectual appreciation of its social commentary. This, in turn, destroys the carnival's ludic aspect and prevents the individual from experiencing the carnival's "wholeness" (Iswolsky 1984 12).

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The LGBTQ carnivals have built on the cultural rebirthing and liminality offered by the event through the utilisation of political theatre methodologies to challenge legislative oppression, as well as to provide a cultural framework that encourages the continual development of the LGBTQ community. Political theatre is often queried in terms of its quantitative efficacy to engender the large-scale social changes it seeks. Whether performances aim towards changing economic circumstances (as with the 7:84 Theatre Company, npg.), or ideological change (as represented by groups such as Gay Sweatshop, Itzin 1980) the perceivable effect is often restricted to a minority of the audience. This leaves such groups open to the charge of providing unsubstantiated outcomes, particularly when they preach to an audience whose support for the performance's aims is indicated by their very presence. However, there is one major difference at this point: the LGBTQ carnivals' goals are radically different to those of groups who work primarily with the internal community, or those who seek economic reassessment. The carnivals' focus incorporates the experience of the entire community. They aim to affect change by increasing awareness and, indeed, pride in LGBTQ identities, and to improve the legislative rights of LGBTQ persons.

In terms of raising awareness, the performances' efficacy must be measured through qualitative analysis of increased communal knowledge of LGBTQ existence and the issues they face. It is also demonstrated via changes within individuals' self-perception of their sexuality. However, while the measurement of subjective reaction problematises qualitative evaluation, quantitative change is rendered almost impossible to assess as the performances' aims are discussed before and during the spectacles themselves. As a result of these external influences, sample groups are compromised. Therefore, the influence of

political theatre results through a 'ripple' effect, whereby each event and stimulus adds to a larger-scale campaign to increase the carnival's efficacy to impact on its society.

However, if positing that the Pride events have political goals, as opposed to simply representing a celebration of sexuality, it is necessary to consider how these changes are to be effected. This represents a further difference between these modern events and those of the Rabelaisian carnival: its aims and objectives. In the Rabelaisian period the participants were the 'folk', the mass population, and during the festival time "…all were considered equal […] in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by barriers of caste, property, profession and age" (Iswolsky 1984 10). The LGBTQ events, on the other hand, ostensibly cater for a specific, minority section of the community and are confined to the notion of sexuality. Although this thesis argues that the aim of the carnival is to raise the general public's awareness of LGBTQ issues and can be seen as representing a 'special interest', the carnival does mirror the Rabelaisian event by "providing a structure of myth and expression to articulate a communal vision of the order, and disorder of things" (Presdee 2000 35). While it is not a reflection of the whole community, it does reflect issues that affect the populous and could be advantageous to them.

As this thesis suggests that LGBTQ carnival aims to affect change in non-carnival time, this may involve interaction with the authority in power. As the LGBTQ carnivals visited for the purpose of this study required the local authorities' authorisation, it is necessary to consider why the authorities would give this permission, as this will enable an understanding how the events' structure may facilitate their efficacy in fulfilling their aims.

Governmental authority, after all, determines not only the setting of an event, but also the behaviours that are allowed to occur within it.

If the carnival is sanctioned, organised, and, therefore, at least partially 'owned' by authority, they have some control over its presentation and can demarcate its temporality, much like any other festival.[158] State authorisation of such events also carries a potentially more insidious implication, highlighted particularly in modern contexts. The participants' desire for revolution is channelled into preparing for the event, ensuring that emotional intensity is diverted to focus on the completion of pre-event tasks, and as a result, towards the fulfilment of participating in the carnival, rather than towards immediate emotional gratification in revolutionary riot scenarios (such as Stonewall). The time taken in this planning stage itself enables authorities to risk manage the events to pre-empt potential challenge, while the combination of these effects enables them to manage the desire for change itself.

By obtaining 'ownership' of the event, government authorisation can affect the modern LGBTQ carnivals' aims. If the state publicises and authorises a festival, it suggests that a dialogue exists between itself and the carnival participants. This, in turn, gives the impression that the needs of the people are noted and indeed supported, both practically and theoretically, by those in power. The LGBTQ carnival is a community interest event that is promoted (as are other events such as the Notting Hill Carnival) in the context of equality amongst difference.[159] This reflects the aims of the Rabelaisian carnival as stated by

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[158] Conversely, Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment posited that the carnival could be seen as "a kind of safety valve for the passions the common people might otherwise direct to revolution" (Holquist in Iswolsky 1984 xviii).
[159] The Notting Hill Carnival (npg.) celebrates African Caribbean heritage and culture.

Bakhtin as "…sanctioned not by the world of practical conditions but by the highest aims of human existence, that is, by the world of ideals [, and without] this sanction there can be no festivity" (Iswolsky 1984 9).

However, for a government to condone carnivals that aim towards the ideal of equality implies that there is no need for revolution or indeed any form of protest action in the first place (Presdee 2000). Even so, the author's use of the term 'reflects' is important. The governmentally condoned carnivals do not necessarily support 'the highest human ideals', but the governments' own politically motivated interpretation and stipulation of what these ideals should be and what practical measures should be used to achieve them. The floats that are permitted – for example Unison (representing rights of employment), Civil Ceremonies (partnering), the NHS (health care) and various mainstream leisure facilities – suggest equal treatment, and that all citizens are entitled to the same rights – a demonstration of what Presdee suggests is "liberal pluralism" (2000 42). The authority-sanctioned carnival, therefore, establishes a framework of approved rights and behaviours that encourages only 'acceptable' requests for further development to be formulated by the community. This potentially subsumes other revolutionary goals, both within the festive environment and in the non-festive world. Such subsumation may not be against the wishes of the people, as Presdee states:

> …carnival comes from the 'people' in collusion with the 'State' […] the people are complicit in its closure. This model therefore proposes that carnival is both allowed by those in power in order to maintain harmony, but more significantly the people themselves wish to reaffirm their own position within a harmonious collective existence. (2000 42)

The community may willingly accept and comply with the stipulated parameters. However, if they choose to reject the parameter by continuing the life of the carnival outside its liminal time-frame, a power struggle occurs as the group attempts to assert its authority. This is the case with the LGBTQ carnival.

Therefore, a further examination of the aims of the LGBTQ events in comparison to the Rabelaisian carnival is essential as they take place in radically different cultural settings. The aims of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque are deduced from the imagery of the bodily grotesque and status reversals, which are symbolic of the cyclical nature of human life and the seasonal changes, and are credited by Bakhtin with the "power of regeneration" (Iswolsky 1984 38). Holquist states:

> The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church or state, but from a force that pre-exists priests and kings and to whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival. (Holquist 1984 xviii)

This superior power appears to be life itself, and Bakhtin comments that the carnivalesque mask is "connected with the joy of change and reincarnation" (Iswolsky 1984 39). While the terms "regeneration" (Iswolsky 1984 38) and "reincarnation" (Iswolsky 1984 39) connote carnivalesque liminality and temporal change, their connotations vary between regeneration that does not exclude revitalised stasis, and the possibility of regenerating into something different. The Rabelaisian carnival aimed to regenerate the life of the people, rather than having a specific political aim, as the LGBTQ events do. The LGBTQ carnivals, in contrast, are that community's opportunity to invite the general population to question the nature and diversity of human sexuality. The festival does not simply provide the

LGBTQ community with "hope and strength for the world beyond", as Presdee puts it (2000 136), but invites all to experience, and potentially join, a functional society.

This differentiation between the culture of Rabelais' time and that of the LGBTQ Pride festivities dramatically alters their manifestations. Presdee cites the increase in popular entertainment and dedicated leisure time as evidence that the modern carnival has become fragmented (2000). He contends that indulging in supposedly anti-social behaviour forms the majority of this leisure time and constitutes an attempted reversal of order through disregard of the law in favour of individual self-gratification. This is cited as an attempt to engender an alternative culture with a separate set of values attainable regardless of economic circumstance, and indeed, one that can exist in opposition to the dominant order.[160] His arguments focus on his conceptualisation of the activities of an economic underclass and other groups whom he argues feel disenfranchised from society and participate in the behaviour partially as a method of rebellion.

In contrast to Presdee, Bakhtin states that the Rabelaisian model holds that the carnival is the "second life of the people" and remains distinct from the first life of the normal calendar, occurring purely within the festivities' liminal time frame (Iswolsky 1984 9). Furthermore, Bakhtin suggests that the logic of the carnivalesque 'turn-about' relies on the re-evaluation of all social roles in the sphere. Those in authority are deposed, but it is a willing deposal that makes way for regeneration, rather than being an enforced deposal after which the people themselves intend to rule, as is suggested by Presdee.

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[160] Presdee's view of modern carnivalesque violence, although based on Bakhtinian arguments, is nevertheless heavily built on his glamorisation of his own youthful rebellion. As a result, in opposition to Bakhtin, he suggests the carnival aims to enable these other orders to establish rule for themselves (2000).

In contrast, the LGBTQ carnivals seek to regenerate both the first and second life of the people by using the physical aspects of the liminal sphere to reinvigorate the social sphere. Mediation between Presdee's (2000) and Bakhtin's (Iswolsky 1984) theories enable the formulation of an accurate impression of the modern LGBTQ carnival, as both models utilise the common denominator of carnivalesque violence to destabilise prevalent norms. This thesis proposes that LGBTQ carnival violence is a mixture of the two theories, but with the distinction that the form of the violence is a primarily Presdeean assault of theoretically antisocial ideas. Carnivalesque violence is primarily demonstrated in modern festival performances through laughter. It is a fusion of Bakhtin's theorisation of regenerative merriment that seeks to highlight outmoded social perceptions of identity in order that they can be invigorated, and the mocking caw of Presdee that undermines the oppressors of diversity. At this point, it is useful to remember that the term "parade" has the pejorative connotation of being "treated with contempt" (*OED Online*, accessed 4th November 2006). This recalls the carnivalesque concept of debasement and abuse, and is aimed both at the mainstream culture and at the participants. It takes different forms dependent on the perception of the LGBTQ community at the time.

The carnivalesque concept of debasement and abuse is ironically appropriate in this context. On Saturday, July 1st 1972 (according to Power 1995), The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) organised the first Gay Pride march in London, England.[161] It was not necessarily a cohesive gathering.[162] Indeed, the groups who staged the event had something of a history

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[161] In "30 Years of Gay Liberation" (npg.), Tatchell suggests that the first march took place in 1970. As his other sources, such as "30 Years of Gay Pride" (npg.) concur with the accepted date of 1st July 1972, it appears the discrepancy is the result of him writing a generalised piece to bolster activism.
[162] Power has argued that the official Gay Pride march was effectively upstaged by an earlier, spontaneous march attended by around thirty radical drag queens and rent boys. However, while this march was also a radical, carnivalesque event, it is not considered here as the first Gay Pride event owing to its small scale,

of animosity owing to the differing aims of their activism and the methods they used to achieve them.[163] Divisions were particularly significant between gay male groups, radical feminists and lesbian groups who had all hived off into separate communes to enact their differing political perspectives, as participant Jeffrey Weeks has stated:

> …there was a real tension between the radical fairies and the others who regarded themselves as revolutionaries. I had really fallen out with people like Bette Bourne and Stuart Feather and it was the worst sort of sectarianism. It cured me for life of sectarianism because it was like a religious divide… (quoted in Power 1995 260)

Weeks' statement, discussing the interactions of the rest of the 'identity' groups as well as his own arguments with individuals (who were prominent enough to have gained celebrity status outside of the movement), illustrate how desperate the situation had become from an insider's perspective. Nettie Pollard concurs:

> The GLF was like a comet – it wasn't going to continue. At the beginning, what we had in common was much more important than all the differences between men and women, between socialists and radical feminists and everything else – people who were interesting in cottaging and people who weren't, people who wanted to concentrate on women's issues and people who didn't, there was an enormous difference… (quoted in Power 1995 246)

These disputes were not merely personal, but matters affecting the entire LGBTQ community's ethos and indeed actions. Nevertheless, the Pride event went ahead, as Power describes, "[Pride] was attended by more than a thousand people and on the surface was

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because (due to its spontaneous nature) it did not unite the whole community as the subsequent event did, and because it has not gained 'legendary status' in the same way.
[163] The idea of staging 'protest' events had itself been suggested by Antony Grey of the Albany Trust, a group disliked for their tendency to appease rather than provoke (Power 1995).

harmonious; the separatist women returned with a banner 'Gay Women's Liberation' and all of the local groups were present" (1995 260). Weeks, however, adds:

> There were lots of rows preceding it and there were lots of arguments on the march itself between those who were in radical drag and those who weren't….It was all very unhappy and gave people like myself a sense that the heart had gone out of it. There was no longer a Gay Liberation Front, gay liberation was becoming much more dispersed. (quoted in Power 1995 260)

His account is corroborated by *Gay International News*, which commented:

> Gay Pride Week in London brought about an uneasy alliance between factions which have been in open conflict recently. The 'radical feminists' in glittering gender-fuck drag glared in defiance at the 'straight' gays as they marched through London… or danced beside them at the ball the night before at Fulham Town Hall. (Ibid 261)

While *Gay International News* is said to have been known for its hostility toward these and other political groups (Power 1995), it is easy to see how some factions, such as those at the ball, could be interpreted as having deliberately attempted to provoke or irritate those attendees from other groups, particular given the past history suggested by Weeks.

Regardless, as group member Peter Tatchell had stated, the aim of the event was to stage "protest as performance" that was too overt, entertaining and provocative to ignore ("30 Years of Gay Pride", npg., and "30 Years of Gay Liberation", npg.). Power's oral history corroborates this, noting that "it was promoted strongly as a "'Carnival Parade'" (1995 260). Tatchell's statement suggests that, at least in hindsight, he considers the Rabelaisian-style carnival to have been chosen as the method through which to do this: "The march was a carnival-style parade [...] There were lots of extravagant costumes and cheeky banners poking fun at homophobes like Mary Whitehouse" ("30 Years of Gay Pride", npg.). The

central aspect of the carnivals is that they showcase something perceived as homosexual behaviour. As Tatchell also refers to the event as a "parade" (Ibid), some further definitions of the word provide further enlightenment.

As befits a group who have faced opposition, a secondary definition of noun "parade" relates to fencing and denotes "an act of warding off a blow or weapon" (*OED Online*, accessed 24th October 2006). In the instance of the first Gay Pride march, Tatchell states that the satirical nature of the protesters' props and costumes focused on authority figures (such as the government, police and clergy) that they perceived to be their oppressors ("30 Years of Gay Liberation", npg.). By turning these forces into dramatic characters, the protestors could incorporate them into the performance and manipulate their representation to demonstrate their inability to exact complete control over the event and the images it portrayed. Thus, the protestors could actually demonstrate that these forces were failing in their aim to land their "blow" to suppress the LGBTQ community, and as a result were suitable targets for satire (*OED Online*, accessed 24th October 2006).

As well as an act of defence, the parade or carnival is an act of aggression. For a people who at the time had little legal protection, the power for this aggression must come from past successes, such as The Stonewall Riot. The carnival event reminded those within the community about the riot, and educated those who were unaware. As a result, it became a recollection, and indeed a reenactment, of The Stonewall Riot itself, and, significantly, "parade" is also defined as "a public march or procession, *esp.* one celebrating a special day or event" (*OED Online*, accessed 24th October 2006). Thus, the purpose of this instance of

political theatre is to remind the community of their history, proving its importance to consecrate its repetition to demonstrate their continued anger at former mistreatment.

As the LGBTQ events were, as Tatchell states, a method of public "performance as protest" ("30 Years of Gay Liberation", npg.) they were also intended to be enjoyable. This is important on both a real and liminal level. To include an element of fun in any event is now recognised as a hallmark of community development theory and practice as it encourages participants to become involved and, thus, promotes the growth of the community. It also suggests a framework through which change can be achieved, as it demonstrates that direct action can gain public attention, facilitate community decision-making and strategy, and attempt to influence government-level politics. Networking in this way was massively important for the LGBTQ community, which had previously been hidden – as Tatchell has stated, people watching the parade may never have been aware of knowing a homosexual before ("30 Years of Gay Pride", npg.).

It proved that such an event was possible and would be allowed to happen, despite supposed police disapproval. This, therefore, suggests that governmental policy can be challenged and, indeed, did change. The framework that enables this to happen is created through the social perceptions of LGBTQ identity. As with any parade, the Pride event also forms a procession for "the mustering of troops for inspection or display" (*OED Online*, accessed 24th October 2006). "Mustering troops for inspection" (Ibid) suggests that those on parade are the epitome of homosexuality. The event is a display of hyperbolised elements of LGBTQ culture in which the community takes pride, and as a result they are intended to be aspirational.

Confirmation of this standpoint can be found by comparing the event with other processions, such as that celebrating Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee. Marchers at this event comprised of people considered to have contributed to society, such as war veterans who marched as a demonstration of success in the restoration of world order. As a result, their role in the procession served as a reminder to their audience that they could play a part in the community. These veterans implicitly represent the continuing need to fight for justice. Thus, the parade becomes an opportunity to "march in procession or with great display or ostentation […] in a public place, especially in order to be seen; to show off" (*OED Online*, accessed 24th October 2006). In the instance of the Pride Parades, the display becomes the ability to critique culture. It is, in part, this ability that enables the parades to appeal to a mass audience, and gives them 'a quality' that is valuable in consumer terms.[164] The equation of these disparate groups (the LGBTQ performers and the war veterans) demonstrates the LGBTQ community's utilisation of parade and march structures as what Russo calls a "redeployment or counter production of culture" to be an exemplification of carnival violence (Russo 1997 325).

Thirty years on, homosexuality is still opposed by some sections of the population, and, thus, to parade in an increasingly flamboyant display of the signifiers of LGBTQ identity constitutes an act of ideological violence against those who would challenge the community's rights and, in some cases, threaten them with damnation.[165] Their clothing can be interpreted in these circumstances as representing a military outfit, where the costume is designed to accentuate the differentiation between groups of people. This is particularly the

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[164] For a discussion of the 'contribution' that LGBTQ groups can make to mainstream society, see Norton (1997).
[165] Particularly those from religious groups, as could be seen from flyers presented by those demonstrating against the 2006 Manchester parade.

case with drag queens. Mirroring the concept of the military standard, their costume both depicts the force and acts as a glyph of its ideals - in this case, the right of LGBTQ people to be present in the community. In this sense, the drag queen's military costume is very effective.

During respondent interviews, it became apparent that while some performers did not appear to be aware of the history of drag performance in LGBTQ communities or The Stonewall Riot, they did subscribe to the notion of costume as flag. Respondent Davey describes performer CherAround wielding a rainbow banner to perform the LGBTQ anthem "I am what I am" (Herman 1983). The rainbow flag was developed and is recognised as the banner of LGBTQ people as its colours are understood to indicate an array of different sexual behaviours. The rainbow on its own is a cultural symbol for other, more mundane phenomena, such as the weather, or happiness, but when used as a prop in conjunction with drag queens it denotes LGBTQ identities. It is, therefore, an expression of personal identity and a political statement not invested in toleration of oppositional views. It demonstrates that the carnivals, and indeed the LGBTQ community, will not allow themselves to be suppressed or forced into a stance of what Presdee terms "[victimhood]" (2000 153).[166]

The power of the image also demands that the onlooker accepts the LGBTQ sexuality as a powerful force in opposition to dominant norms. The display acts as an invitation for others to join in with the expectation of furthering their understanding of diverse sexual identities. At the Wakefield 2006 Pride parade, participants in costumes signifying aspects of LGBTQ

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[166] This approach – and the repercussions of it - can be seen most clearly in Equal Opportunities legislation and guidelines, where to challenge 'bigotry' is to do one's civic duty, see "Hate Crime" (npg.).

culture invited passers-by to "Come and join us!", when there was no indication that the onlookers were anything other than heterosexual. Additionally, self-identified heterosexuals marched in the middle of the crowd and told event organisers that they had joined the parade to show support to the community. The parade itself consisted of people in a variety of guises, from drag queens, to men wearing angel costumes (another signifier of homosexuality), to people wearing traditional sexuality and gender normative dress. They all stood under the same banner and received waves and cheers from viewers who braved wet weather to greet them on the street.

That the costumes facilitate the involvement of the external community demonstrates that "people [are] so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations" as was the case in the Rabelaisian carnival (Iswolsky 1984 10). One of the essential aspects of these relations is the "'unmasking' and disclosing of the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks", thus, stripping the "authoritarian word" of its power and exclusivity (Pomorska 1984 x). That is to say, the carnivalesque violence involves the removal of formal indicators of power and their institutions by establishing new variants, and consequently shows each individual as they truly are; for instance, once the indicators of the police's power (such as their uniform) are removed, they become mere people. This provokes the ire of external communities as it acts as a form of ideological violence, whilst also leaving the LGBTQ participants open to the charge of contributing to their own marginalisation as "the pleasures of the 'body' [are] foregrounded, in opposition to the dominant and accepted values of restraint and sobriety" (Presdee 2000 38).[167] This is particularly the case when the carnivals, such as Wakefield and Manchester Pride 2006,

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[167] Such an attitude can be seen in *The Sun* newspaper's report of a group of lesbians allegedly offering minor sexual favours to non-LGBTQ travellers while journeying to a Pride event. Whether or not this quotation is factual, it represents the distastes of certain quarters of society for sexual behaviour (Sanderson 1995).

display arguably controversial stalls such as those selling sex aids within public shopping areas.[168]

The mainstream's perception of this type of ideological violence can be compared to the notion of evil as the normative face of culture that creates terror for the establishment. As Halberstam comments: "evil stretches across cultural and political production as complicity and collaboration and it manifests itself as a seamless norm [for instance as part of a parade] rather than as some monstrous disruption" (2000 162). This creates a tension whereby the mainstream's very sponsorship of the event becomes a moment of both the horror and the pleasure of the sexual, where the LGBTQ community are at once embraced by a mainstream culture that fetishises sexuality, and yet derides it as unnatural if it ventures outside of the shadows into the public eye. As Halberstam comments:

> The postmodern monster is no longer the hideous other storming the gates of the human citadel, he has already disrupted the careful geography of human self and demon other and he makes the peripheral and the marginal part of the centre. Monsters within postmodernism are already inside – the house, the body, the head, the skin, the nation – and they work their way out […] Monstrosity no longer coagulates into a specific body, a single face, a unique feature; it is replaced with a banality that fractures resistance because the enemy becomes harder to locate and looks more and more like the hero. What were monsters are now facets of identity; the sexual other and the racial other can no longer be safely separated from self. (2000 162-163)

The behaviour at the carnivals thus becomes a rebuke to the external community, as is demonstrated by Tatchell's comments concerning the first GLF Gay Pride carnival:

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[168] For example "JDL For Leather", which sold a variety of sado-masochistic instruments at Manchester Pride 2006.

Many reacted with revulsion and horror when GLF proclaimed: "2-4-6-8! Gay is just as good as straight!" Those words – which were so empowering to queers everywhere – frightened the life out of smug, arrogant straight people, who had always assumed they were superior. ("30 Years of Gay Liberation", npg.)[169]

When examining this statement, it must be remembered that at the time of the first carnival, homosexuality was still very much a taboo subject. Thus, Tatchell suggests that it is not enough to remove the notion of homosexuality as taboo, but that it should be accepted, and indeed lauded as "just as good" as the heterosexual norm and ideal (Ibid). In fact, the persuasion takes the form of a cheerleader-style jingle, which therefore, also draws attention to the campaign. Indeed, although attitudes towards the LGBTQ community have become more positive in recent years, there are still cases where this style of protest provokes anger from the external community.[170]

The act of ideological violence or disruption also occurs within the community itself. The carnivals are not without their internal disputes. Indeed, although they are billed as the celebration and promotion of LGBTQ rights and equality, there are criticisms echoing Anatoly Lunacharsky's statement that the carnival acts as a safety valve for the community's concerns and frustration (Fitzpatrick 1970). The form of the event itself can be a bone of contention, as groups such as OutRage! have argued it should provide a platform to campaign for issues that would give the community freedom over and above that enjoyed by heterosexuals, for example by lowering the age of consent to fourteen years ("Consent at 14 -", npg.), while other groups argue it should form a celebration of gains already made in terms of mainstream acceptance. This was reflected in the floats at

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[169] This statement can, of course, be taken to refer to the 'search for heroes' set out in Chapter Two of this thesis.
[170] As can be seen from the recent case in which fire fighters refused to participate in a carnival (*The Scotsman*, npg.).

Manchester Pride 2006, where only a proportion featured acts that, while incorporating the performance of LGBTQ identity rather than consisting solely of commercialism, only loosely related to the community as a result of their participation in mainstream culture. However, some sections of the community wanted to remain 'anti-social' if this was a means to "express their individuality" (Presdee 2000 158), and, therefore, minimise the risk of their identity being submerged in mainstream culture. Such anti-social behaviour could be seen at the Manchester Pride parade in which the QueerKafferia group dressed as elderly women, presumably to satirise Mary Whitehouse, to distribute "Grannyfesto" questionnaire leaflets relating to the event's ethos. This indicates their awareness of the limitations imposed on the carnival by authorities, as discussed previously, and recognition that using the authorised space may be inadequate for true revolution.

Groups such as QueerKafferia demonstrate how the carnivalesque "[terrorises] (actually and metaphorically) the weak as much as the strong, the oppressed as much as the oppressors" (Presdee 2000 41). They suggest that the carnivalesque rejects the perception of the community carnival as a simple celebration, as opposed to a chance to investigate "the foregrounding of the popular and grotesque body over the fixed and static" (Ibid). Therefore, parading in this fashion forms a rebuke to the community itself for settling into reticence by using the Bakhtinian model of the carnival to celebrate collective regeneration, rather than the Presdeean interpretation of establishing a new social order, which is what QueerKafferia's tactic represents. Indeed, the LGBTQ carnival is truly revolutionary as it reminds the internal community of its roots through the liminal atmosphere, but also points towards the non-liminal future by assaulting the sensibilities, for example in the QueerKafferia "Grannyfesto", which posed new questions considering the community's future development. This, in particular, is a method demonstrating the parades'

revolutionary potential, as it conforms to what may be considered as theatrical community development, where the performers offer the other participants the opportunity of continued involvement, discussing issues away from the parade. QueerKafferia invited the participants to become involved in a network of other activities, ranging from an internet discussion group to arts groups dedicated to exploring LGBTQ issues and identities. These activities are made possible through the 'rebirthing' opportunities stemming from the carnival.

Furthermore, working with, rather than against the authorities affords the carnival participants credibility. As has previously been observed, the placement of a political theatre carnival in a public space requires the consent of the local authority. The disruption of street life caused by a parade requires the authorities' co-operation to maintain order. This order is signified by the police who join the parade and effectively form an escort. Police escorts are often used to protect those who may face threat whilst in the public space, such as prisoners in transition to and from trial. Prisoners are those who have been charged with offences against society and, as a result, the parade itself connotes the hostility that the LGBTQ community still faces from some sections of the public, and represents the fact they require protection. This remains the case whether police line the entire route of the carnival, as happened in the first LGBTQ pride marches organised by the GLF, or whether they group at the front and rear of the procession, as was the case in the 2006 marches. The decrease in numbers indicates the lowered level of potential threat anticipated from the carnival viewers, while the stationing of event organisers along the route indicates that authority remains present should problems arise, although the need for organisers to have legal powers has diminished.

The subversion of the carnival can, however, transform the risk management of perceived threat into signification of the government's approval of the community. This is important both in the context of the activist characters they are 'playing' in the carnival to campaign for this acceptance, and, subsequently, for the residents of the community, outside of the activist role. The police protect the community rather than keep them under surveillance, as would be the case in a riot situation. Indeed, by gaining a police escort, the parade participants are able to subvert the establishment to underline the assertion that their community should be visible to, and accepted by, mainstream society. This was particularly the case at Wakefield Pride, where, in addition to the police escort, the town's Lord Mayor walked with the performers at the front of the parade for the duration. A primary function of the Lord Mayor's post is to act as a diplomat and "first citizen" of the borough when the community requests his attendance, and as a result, he is positioned to act as a mediator between the LGBTQ community and the rest of society, in order to promote the tolerance and understanding of homosexuality.[171] His co-option by the LGBTQ community actually has the historical impact of engaging his authority (and, therefore, that of the government) to represent their issues and ensure that their needs are met.

However, the validation bestowed on the community by the presence of the police and Lord Mayor has connotations that go beyond the promotion of tolerance, a process recalling Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque reversal of authority (Iswolsky 1984). Police escorts are also utilised to protect authority figures, such as royalty, and are an indicator of their charges' status, while a historical role of the Lord Mayor was to handle "delegated jurisdiction or executive functions under the monarch or under some judicial authority" (*OED Online*, accessed 19th November 2006). The police protect the parade attendees, who

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[171] As is described in, "The Role of Mayor", on the Warrington Council website.

become symbols of authority, walking at the head of the parade and in prominent places on the floats, while the Lord Mayor, as their representative, works under their jurisdiction and walks next to them. The status accorded to the carnival in the liminal state enables the carnival goers to temporarily usurp the position of the monarch. The monarch of the country formalises proposed legislation through a pre-parliamentary speech. The legislation proposed by the LGBTQ events' monarch (the Carnival Queen, no less) is not simply tolerance, as the carnival atmosphere renders the notion of hostility obsolete, but, instead, forms an extrapolation of the rebirthing of the crowd through the performers and liminality. It contends that all within the carnival environment should glorify the participants as symbols of diverse sexuality, and, indeed, should take pride in experiencing diverse sexuality themselves. After all, the real monarch symbolises national identity and acts as the ideal of national pride to which their subjects should aspire.

However, the law can only be maintained if the citizens themselves uphold it. In this instance, the average citizen is represented by the Lord Mayor – the "first citizen" - ("The Role of Mayor", npg.) and the police officer. Both figures represent respect for recognised authority and justice and, thus, constitute the ideal behaviour for the rest of society. The co-operation of authoritative figures asserts not only their acceptance of the carnival monarch's legislation, but also that the legislation should be accepted as justifiable by all citizens, that is, the rest of the people present at the parade, and indeed beyond it. Moreover, these and other authority figures actually feature within the procession themselves. As has been stated, in the first LGBTQ carnival events where attitudes towards homosexuality were still ambivalent, if not condemnatory, the parade participants would dress as, and satirise, the police and the clergy ("30 Years of Gay Liberation", npg.). In recent events the increased acceptance of homosexuality has resulted in legitimate LGBTQ

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police societies taking part. The characters in the parade do not merely support the carnival monarch's legislation: they live it.

However, as previously suggested, while the carnival transforms the public space, the revolutionary concepts presented by both Bakhtin and Presdee are necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact and influence of the modern event in the non-carnival world. To witness authority figures and the LGBTQ community working in the harmony of the carnival atmosphere suggests that such a relationship is possible in the non-liminal world in order to have been conceived in the first place. After all, LGBTQ participants no longer need to dress up and act as the police in order to represent them in the performance. The events install a supportive relationship on which both sides can build.

Just as the LGBTQ carnivals challenge political and social oppression, they also provide for the participants' emotional well-being and spirituality in light of their diverse sexualities. This facilitates the establishment of a comprehensive social structure that supports the continued development of the community, both internally and in non-LGBTQ society. Joan Holden (of the San Francisco Mime Troupe) has commented that "[the] purpose of political theatre is not only to make people think but to make them act. For most people this requires emotional engagement" (Prentki and Selman 2000 26). This process is facilitated through the performance of the AIDS procession and vigil in which the community remembers those who died of the disease. In the first instance, the vigil, as a marker of grief, encourages social tolerance of the community through empathy.

The vigil also has further ramifications for the community's actual continuation. As previously stated, the performers' costumes focus on the body, while participation in the event increases the attendees' awareness of their own spatial relationship to others. Thus, the impact of these deaths is made more resonant, as each participant is forced to contemplate their involvement in a procession that commemorates the death of the body. The procession itself, therefore, represents the carnivalesque spirit as it revives Bakhtin's conceptualisation of Rabelais' depiction of the ancestral body of the people (Iswolsky 1984). Carnival death is generative death as it serves to remind the community of regeneration and cohesion by bringing mourners together in grief and remembrance. The rainbow flag connotes the physical death of members of the community as well as their life. As a symbol of the skies, or heavens, it also immortalises their spirit. They are the community's martyrs and are used to represent their lives to encourage the community to advance. They unite the remaining members of their community both in remembrance and, through the differences between their lives and the current time-frame, serve as a reminder that the exploration of sex, identity and society is constantly evolving, and, thus, should be further explored. The dead fertilize the imaginations. As a result, they glorify the exploration of sexual identity, rather than condemning it.

On the other hand, the procession also functions to reassure those who had not previously considered themselves to have an LGBTQ identity that spirituality is available to them, should they reconceptualise their sexuality. Here, there is a correlation with camp, which has been defined by Susan Sontag (npg., 1966) as "a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naive". The seriousness that fails in this context is sexual relations, and as a result, reproduction.

However, camp's redemption of sexual relations takes place through the use of the carnival's ritual laughter (Iswolsky 1984). Procreation, if posited as the goal of sexual relations, can itself be ridiculed when reduced to its bare physical economics, to the exclusion of its psychological and social impacts. Procreation reveals the social structures that institutionalise it to be organisational eco-systems rather than guardians of a universal philosophical truth, on the basis that not all heterosexual sexual intercourse results in conception. Sex must, therefore, also be for other purposes than populating the earth. The LGBTQ participants, thus, usurp the position of the clergy to replace the search for universal philosophical truth (or a relationship with a conception of the divine) with the attempt to understand the sexual act through fulfilment of the self. This can be seen as the case when participants of the first GLF Pride actually dressed as the clergy. The goal of the sexual relationship is repositioned as the birth of physical fulfilment, while the religious revelation presents as self-knowledge.[172] It is a theory compatible with Rabelais' work as it represents the "interface between a stasis imposed from above and a desire for change from below, between old and new, official and unofficial" (Holquist in Iswolsky 1984 xvi). In this sense, the men who displayed those images of the homosexual clergy were representing a version of the carnivalesque image of what Bakhtin calls the "real and ideal at the same time" (Iswolsky 1984 8). They act as a demonstration of the reality of LGBTQ life as one that can encompass difficulties, whether this is in terms of acceptance within the community, or in terms of issues such as mortality, as well as carnivalesque spirituality and the social network that provides for any needs that can arise.

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[172] It is interesting that modern traditions in both sexual relations and ceremonial magic speak of union with the divine at the point of orgasm. Indeed, Tindsley speaks of the use of sexual intercourse as a method of creating the necessary energy to use to engender the focus of a spell (2002).

The geographical settings of the modern LGBTQ carnival events facilitate raising awareness of, and empowering, the community. Both the GLF carnivals performed at the beginning of the modern LGBTQ rights movement and the recent events held in Manchester and Wakefield utilised aspects of the traditional carnival, as posited by Bakhtin. These included the focus on the grotesque body and the use of liminality to provide a point of entry for the external community to understand LGBTQ issues. The continuous development of these concepts has been ensured through the facilities provided by the LGBTQ community to investigate identities further and revolutionise commonly held perceptions of self. This self is also extrapolated through the carnival's characteristic 'turn about', which, as a result of the cultural-levelling aspect of liminality, enables the focus of the event to be widened to include a basic critique that questions current social systems in order to provide for the needs of its people. The task of interrogating these systems has been enthusiastically taken by LGBTQ people in a variety of circumstances, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Drag and Camp Traditions in British Popular Culture

> Entertainment can satisfy the spectator in many different ways. It generates
> more signs and symbols for him to decode and provides him with more material
> to explore as he tries to see behind the mask. (Higgins 1993 244)

This chapter will illustrate the sheer variety of "masks" that drag performance uses to entertain and, thus, educate the spectator. The preceding chapters of this thesis have demonstrated how the LGBTQ community has utilised drag performance as a method of developing social commentary. Through the use of performance and political theatre techniques incorporating the co-option of governmental mechanisms and civic protocols, the community has attempted to facilitate social change by drawing attention to its cause in order to influence legislation and gain official recognition. However, it could be argued that the pursuit of legislative change is reactionary, as it aims to force compliance with set actions and behaviours, rather than challenging the thought processes that necessitate the precautionary measures in the first place. Furthermore, while the carnivals can challenge perceptions of identity and sexuality, they are primarily effective when engaging the audience in participating venues and along the parade's route. Secondary outcomes - such as the alteration of the attendees' perspectives in the long-term, and their further promotion of the carnival's message - are problematic to evaluate as an indicator of the performance's success.

There is, however, a way in which LGBTQ political performance has definitely influenced mainstream culture: over the course of the last century, it has become a prominent part of televised, mainstream entertainment. This chapter demonstrates how this entertainment constitutes educational, political performance by challenging perceptions of homosexuality and notions of stable identities and, therefore, the concept of 'otherness' itself. In order to

ascertain the trends through which this discourse has transferred into mainstream culture, the chapter begins with a brief contextualisation of the history of public, cross-dressed performance.[173] This is followed by a three-part examination detailing how differing performance styles have progressively enabled a public appreciation of the politics of personal identity. The first part of this examination focuses on post-war drag revue companies, with specific reference to the performances of Danny La Rue, to theorise how the interaction between the audience and the performer can introduce the concept of limited, vicarious social-boundary crossing.[174] The second part posits camp and drag performance as systems of identity critique that have penetrated public consciousness to encourage a consideration of the performers' identities. This will lead to an examination of prescribed taboos, as will be demonstrated with reference to performer Larry Grayson (as contrasted with La Rue). In turn, the contemporary performances of Paul O'Grady (the alter-ego of drag persona Lily Savage) will be seen to encourage a sympathetic, yet realistic critique of gender and other social expectations. Finally, the chapter demonstrates how drag performance in the contemporary television programme *Little Britain* (2003) interacts with its viewers and, through the use of the visual grotesque, forces them to evaluate their own attitudes and aspirations as part of the national community.

In order to qualify the impact and effects of drag performance on mainstream English society, it is necessary to briefly review how and why it was staged historically, as this informs the trends and symbolism that have become part of the past century's prevalent drag-performance styles. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, E. K. Chambers illustrates a long tradition of males performing female roles in mainstream culture (1903

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[173] The implications of notionally unstable gender identity are performed to the LGBTQ community by the shamanic figure of the drag queen, as discussed in Chapter Two.
[174] Who is also known by his birth name, Daniel Carroll (La Rue 1987).

and 1933; also Brody 1971). In these cases, cross-dressed actors represented female characters in religious dramas, theoretically to preserve the women's perceived moral integrity by preventing the exhibition of their bodies (Baker 1994). The public performance of female impersonation has also been used to invoke feminine power to dramatise community upheaval (see Davies 1975 and Russo 1997), and subsequently to establish secularised rituals encouraging human interaction.[175] While there are limited records detailing how females were represented, it is clear that the effect could have been either realistic or comic, depending on what was required for the occasion.

Whilst details of religious cross-dressed performance are relatively scarce, there is more information regarding non-religious varieties. Again, supposed moral impropriety prohibited the appearance of women on the stage during the Renaissance; young men (such as Edward Kynaston) would play the female roles.[176] Contemporary theatre critics' reviews suggest that the actors' ability to recreate the qualities associated with femininity, such as beauty, were the basis on which their performances were judged as credible.[177] This suggests that performers in non-comic plays had to be comparable with biological females. They shared similarities with modern female impersonators, although the term 'male actress' may be more apt (Baker 1994).[178] Conversely, aged or less dramatically serious figures were played by older males. Their attempts to mimic the female form highlighted their incongruous comparison to the character they portrayed, resulting in humour and

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[175] As discussed with reference to the use of the liminal carnival in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

[176] Stated as "one of the last boy-players of women's roles" (*The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, npg.).

[177] For example: "After seeing him as the Duke's sister in a revival of Fletcher's *The Loyal Subject*, Pepys said: 'He made the loveliest lady that ever I saw in my life'" (*The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, npg.).

[178] 'Male actresses' portrayed the characters as realistically as possible, rather than presenting only attributes traditionally associated with femaleness (in the manner of a female impersonator) as discussed in the previous chapter.

ensuring that they tended to play comic characters (Greenblatt 1997). Such performers' comic hyperbolisation of femininity was likely to be closer in style to modern drag performance.

Historically, therefore, realistic female portrayals conveyed serious performative content, while experienced or comic characters tended to be performed with a less realistic, more anarchic quality. The amalgamation of these styles will be demonstrated to enable modern drag performance to entertain and also educate its audience.

Despite the eventual admission of female actors to the stage, male cross-dressed performance continued in mainstream entertainment through comic mediums such as pantomime, cabaret and music hall (Mander and Mitchenson 1973; and La Rue 1987). The influences of cabaret and music hall are easily recognisable in modern drag performance, and they were the springboard for the career of Danny La Rue, a leading "comic in a frock" (as he describes himself in "Clown in a Gown", npg.). In his autobiography, *From Drags to Riches: My Autobiography* (1987), La Rue recounts his entrance into drag performance, working on single-sex ships during the Second World War. He recollects how crews who were at sea for long periods entertained themselves by staging comic routines or fashion parades known as 'concert revues' in which they created the impression of women by dressing in feminine attire. When the war ended, groups such as Splinters, Soldiers in Skirts, and Forces Showboat instead toured their productions across the country, playing to the general public:

> They were big companies, well-dressed and staged with good scenery, and
> included sketches, dance routines, songs and lavish production numbers. The
> shows were billed as family entertainment […] the shows certainly captured the

imagination of the public and played to very good houses almost everywhere. The shows were well-rehearsed and the entertainment value, in the main, was excellent. (La Rue 1987 71)

The performances were accomplished, often bawdy, and laughter would prevail. La Rue has suggested (1987) it may be the case that the audience needed the spectacle, glamour and humour to temporarily escape the austerity of the post-war society. As a result, the shows began a new era of subversive and transformative drag performance in a modern-mainstream context.[179] The theatrical environment, after all, allows both the audience and the performer to temporarily change their surroundings or pretend to be someone different.

For some LGBTQ actors, the theatre offered the option of obscuring their sexuality (Baker 1994) as well as acceptance into a group where their social and sexual needs may be met by potentially like-minded people.[180] Where performances included topics such as gender or relationships, it is possible to speculate whether the performers felt their subculture could develop alternative perspectives of traditional sex-role boundaries, evolving different semiological and theoretical attributes to those of mainstream performances.

When the performance attributes (developed within – or with knowledge of – these sub-cultural influences) cross over into the mainstream, they establish a new dialogue merging different perspectives of sex and gender roles. Marjorie Garber has stated that the power of drag performance derives from its recognition that clothing is the prime signifier of social

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[179] For alongside mainstream cross-dressed performance, LGBTQ subcultures also had their own subversive performance traditions. For instances of sub-cultural performances, see David (1997).
[180] This appears to be the case in both serious and comic theatre traditions. La Rue comments in *From Drags to Riches: My Autobiography* that his co-stars in the post-forces cabarets would exhibit behaviour transcending sex-role boundaries outside their performances (La Rue 1989), while Sir Ian McKellan, a noted Shakespearean actor and homosexual, has commented that he "…also wanted to be an actor because [he] thought [he] could meet queers" (Higgins 1993 245).

boundaries, and visually structures society according to sex, and (subsequently) economic class and religion (1993). This, she argues, is because clothing offers the simplest, most complete method of transversing these social structures by enabling the wearer to at least appear to change class and sex – despite the latter's status as one of only two uncontrollable aspects of human existence (the other being death, which religion aims to manage).[181] Utilising aspects of Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity, Garber asserts that this visible mutability enables the individual to traverse the boundary if their appearance is accepted by the society.

As Laurence Senelick has commented, Garber's thesis is hampered by its suggestion of a polarised conception of gender that largely ignores biological intersexuality or non-stereotypical sex-role behaviour (Senelick 2000). However, her argument that clothing enables the wearer to appear to overcome one of the two seeming insurmountable social boundaries can be further developed. She utilises Butler's theories to suggest that clothing can enable the wearer to elicit the response they require from their onlookers, but this does not necessarily entail that the wearer desires the same response for the duration of their performance, indeed it is rare that they do in any human interaction. Cross-dressed performance can enable a male to appear like - and be taken as - a female one moment, whilst highlighting the illusion the next. Furthermore, the theatre environment can either encourage the suspension of disbelief by placing the performers at a distance where their physical details are indiscernible, or it can shine a spotlight on the performed deconstruction of carefully constructed femininity.

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[181] Sex can be traversed visually, but not, to date, biologically. While a post-operative transsexual may gain aspects of the other sex, they are unable to procreate.

The point is that it gleefully tricks the mind, and often has the greatest effect on the audience when presenting illusions that encourage them to knowingly challenge their perceptions of the images that construct conceptions of reality – in this case the functionality of gender – by contradicting their knowledge of the performers' true identities.[182] As this chapter will now demonstrate, the efficacy of post-war cross-dressed performance depended on the audience's acceptance that gender could appear to be temporarily swapped, which in turn enabled the audience to believe that they could, briefly and fantastically, traverse the final social boundary of death. While the following analysis of war-time perspectives is speculative, historical sources underline their possibility.

The themes of gender and mortality are a constant undercurrent in LGBTQ drag entertainment.[183] They also loomed large in the lives of the post-wartime drag audiences who had experienced the hardships associated with altered gender roles and death on a massive scale.[184] La Rue has commented that the post-war theatre of flamboyant drag performance functioned as a fantasy environment where such cares and realities could be left outside the door (La Rue 1987). This perception is astute, with the minor alteration that the audience left only the direct confrontation with their cares outside. The fantasy environment offered by the theatre space did, temporarily, enable reality itself to be transcended in order to covertly examine issues of concern. For example, audiences troubled by the alteration of gender roles could acclimatise themselves to the hitherto unthinkable traversal of Garber's (1997) suggested social boundary by experiencing how they would react to dramatically altered gender presentation by witnessing the illusion of

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[182] The audience's desire to contradict their knowledge can also be seen in the popularity of illusionists such as Derren Brown, whose performances question the boundary between psychic ability and psychology.
[183] As has been discussed, particularly in Chapter Two of this thesis.
[184] Hardships included the effect on the workforce (Woollacott 1994).

transexuality. Moreover, as a result of the theatre's transformative power, they could conceive the traversal as a *temporary* possibility as they knew that the glamorous women on stage were actually males who left their families to fight in the conflict. Therefore, the drag performance's fantastical presentation both alluded to - and encouraged the consideration of - the recent social changes the audience had lived through, whilst being set in an environment where they also had 'permission' to enjoy themselves.

The audience's desire to understand the recent transgression of gender boundaries through the drag performances was rendered acceptable in the theatre as it was courteous to demonstrate appreciation for extravagant performances in respectable venues. Their consciences were further cleared as they had the additional 'safety net' of being able to question the gender boundary doubly vicariously, as the servicemen were already crossing it vicariously on their behalf. Despite La Rue's (1987) assertion that most performers were blatantly homosexual - they were nevertheless considered to be masculine war heroes whom (the audience could assure themselves) were merely playing roles developed to compensate for the absence of women to lust after! As a result, the audience would believe they remained within social boundaries and could allow themselves to be drawn further into the performance because they were not 'really' listening to a sermonising transvestite![185]

Consequently, the performance constituted the phantasmal evocation of a differently gendered 'other' representing both the personification of a boundary-crosser and the representation of the audience's own concerns, which were then projected onto the drag

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[185] As the second and fourth chapters of this thesis document, drag performances in post-Christian society can refocus the debate on the human-life cycle toward a reconceptualisation of individual self-perception and spirituality. However, the then-Christian beliefs and heterosexual social structure negated the potential for the spiritual reconfiguration, as few would engage in the manner they might in later LGBTQ Pride carnivals.

artist. This phantasm represented not an alternative aspiration, a desire to change sex, but a method of considering the circumstances that had brought everyone to the theatre. The phantasm constituted the non-traditional gendering necessitated by the war, but also a personification of death itself. The performers were military men who had survived the conflict, and many - such as Forces Showboat - referred to this in their promotional material (La Rue 1987). The show could, therefore, also be interpreted as the audience's method of spending time with friends of – and therefore temporary stand-ins for – their lost loved ones; it was the equivalent of watching a video of the person when they were themselves unavailable and provided the audience with a means to come to terms with their grief. Furthermore, the performances celebrated a skill that bought the performers fame – supposedly generated by, and therefore reinforcing, their masculinity. As a result, attendance at the performances was patriotic as the audience were financially supporting those who had battled for their country, as well as celebrating the cultural traditions that their victory had protected.

The theatrical setting also meant the audience could interact with the performers. Particularly in styles incorporating improvisation, such as cabaret and music hall, the audience could change the dynamic of the performance by applauding or laughing to audibly demonstrate their appreciation of the material and encourage more aspects that reflected their primary concerns. McQuail suggests such a vicarious experience justifies the spectacle of performance (1997), and indeed, La Rue talks of the intimacy he associates with live theatre (1987). The rapport that La Rue states (Ibid) existed between the performer and the audience would draw on this physical intimacy and create an emotional bond that enabled social issues of concern to be tackled in the safe environment (Ibid). It

could be a deeply therapeutic experience that helped all present to consider, understand and accept the changes their society had undergone.

This is not to suggest that the audiences utilised drag solely to consider their anxieties figuratively, or that they did not enjoy the performances as entertainment in its own right. In fact, drag's very popularity facilitated the increased acceptance of sexual diversity in mainstream society, as a comparison of the performers Danny La Rue and Larry Grayson will demonstrate. At first glance, they appear rather disparate comparison studies in the context of cross-dressed performance: La Rue is credited by other drag artists as the performer responsible for bringing drag to the mainstream (Kirk and Heath 1984), while Grayson performed in a man's suit. However, a comparison of their performance styles and personae will elucidate how drag and post-drag performance enabled them to gain acceptance in order to transgress previously accepted gender presentation boundaries and, as a result, appeal to the mainstream audience.

La Rue's popularity is based on a mixture of nostalgia for traditional values such as aspiration and the physical glamour used to connote it, and, conversely, transgression of that very same austerity. Part of this effect resulted from his costume. La Rue initially gained notice as a result of his ability to control his image and create a striking appearance when he began to perform in cross-dressed revues following the war (La Rue 1987). A later photograph of the cabaret troop at Winston's nightclub indicates his ability to suggest his importance and command the audience's gaze.[186] He stands in the back row, to the right-hand side of Barbara Windsor's Aladdin. His prominent position within the group

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[186] The photograph can be found on the second page of the inserted sheath between pages 96 and 97 (La Rue 1987).

immediately lends him a certain authority over his co-stars: he stands towards the centre, is slightly taller than his opposite number, and his costume draws the eye. It is a white dress that reflects the light and contrasts with the colourful background and other performers. It covers his arms to convey taste and decorum, an effect bolstered by the deep (but narrow) v-neck cut, which creates the impression of breasts as well as acting as a further display of decorative extravagance. Furthermore, the jewels sewn on to his dress contrast with his skin tone, while a jewelled and feathered headdress emphasises his imposing figure. The effect of the costume (in contrast to the darker, stock-type examples worn by his co-stars) suggests attainable wealth and prestige, and is aspirational as a result.

La Rue (back row, second from the right) with the cast of Aladdin. (La Rue 1987)

This aspiration is not, however, the voyeuristic, exotic, shallow variant suggested by his co-stars' heavily-jewelled costumes. La Rue's outfit is well-crafted and comparatively subtle. As a result, it suggests wealth developed through endeavour in a working environment, signifying the financial rewards generated by the provision of popular, quality entertainment. The theorisation that leads to the development of such an impact is clear. La

Rue recognised that his costumes could have a visceral effect on his audience, a concept elucidated in Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes*:

> Common sense and most historians of costume have assumed that the demands of either utility, status or sex must have been responsible for the invention of clothing. However, as sometimes happens in human affairs, both common sense and the historians were apparently wrong: scholars have recently informed us that the original purpose of clothing was magical. Archaeologists digging up past civilisations and anthropologists studying primitive tribes have come to the conclusion that, as Rachel Kemper puts it, "Paint, ornament, and rudimentary clothing were first employed to attract good animistic powers and to ward off evil". (Lurie 1983 29)

While this assertion refers primarily to religious clothing, it also suggests the wearer's ability to connote the very social power that might enable them to "attract good" (Ibid), or achieve positive outcomes. In order to appreciate the importance of this observation, it is necessary to contrast the scenes in which La Rue worked with those discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Like the performers in venues such as @D2 and the respondents of *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990), La Rue's performances responded to audience interaction made possible through close proximity. However, unlike these other performers, La Rue was performing to an audience unlikely to identify as LGBTQ. His image did not appear to aim to engender others' participation in the drag or LGBTQ 'scene' in order to establish a cultural identity. Rather, his clothing was grandiose and elegant, and demonstrably similar that of the celebrities, such as Princess Anne, as photographed in his autobiography.[187] Therefore, his costumes used connotations of wealth to attract affluent clients.

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[187] The photograph is on the fifth page of the inserted sheath between pages 160 and 161 (La Rue 1987).

Attracting such affluent clients to the venue safeguarded the art form's future. Like the other performers mentioned in this study, La Rue wanted to demonstrate drag's capabilities. He was not simply a pretty face: his troop was adept at singing, dancing and performing comic routines. Utilising both traditional material and creating sketches themselves, they appealed to both established audiences and glamorous new attendees alike. Entertainer Jimmy Tarbuck is quoted in La Rue's autobiography as stating that "…if anyone can captivate an audience, Danny can" (back cover, 1987). The quality of these shows ensured that they attracted influential guests – photographs in *From Drags to Riches: My Autobiography* (Ibid) show La Rue consorting with royalty (Princess Anne) and celebrities (Gracie Fields). The index itself suggests that he considers his influence on these ruling or trend-setting personalities to be one of the most important aspects of his career, for they constitute the entire index. His courtship of these people appears to have established drag as high-quality entertainment that could be appreciated by every social strata, rather than simply being a purveyor of bawdy jokes for the masses, or indeed the LGBTQ community.

However, his performances' most far-reaching and, indeed, memorable aspect was their content. The material could be interpreted simply as a witty satire worthy of the discerning clients' respect if they took the performance at face-value and assumed the feminine creature on stage was commenting on politics. Alternatively, it could become decidedly subversive if they also took into account the image of a man dressing up as a woman. If playing to clientele unused to this type of performance, La Rue was able to demonstrate the sheer fluidity of gender through the dramatic emphasis of its deconstruction. Indeed, he would emphasise the exciting, transgressive nature of the presentation by dropping into vocal tones that have been described as being suggestive of "a rough old lorry driver" ("Paying Court to the King of the Swingers" in *The Times*, 10th October 1992 24). While

the effect of this was comic as a result of the juxtaposition of the masculine voice with the feminine appearance, it denaturalised the performance, leaving the audience under no illusion as to La Rue's sex. His was a mixture of 'masculine' bravado and 'feminine' appearance and presentation. By performing in this way, he did not simply educate his audience as to drag performance's ability to deconstruct social perceptions, but in doing so, he also promoted tolerance of supposed difference. Indeed, as La Rue comments, he changed John Gielgud's perception of drag performers by establishing how to make him laugh (La Rue 1987), thus demonstrating that neither sexuality nor gender representation need form a barrier to social communication. Therefore, he also acted as living proof that the utilisation of different aspects of traditionally accepted masculine and feminine behaviours could aid personal development and establish high social standing.

At the end of each cabaret, La Rue would reappear on stage in a man's dinner suit (all traces of make-up removed) and use masculine voice timbre and gestures to "pass" for, or be accepted as, heterosexual (Ibid) in the terms described by Babuscio (1977 45). Although this may have been intended to distance La Rue from connotations of homosexuality, it popularised the concept that a person could present both genders and yet remain a respected member of the less-liberal society of the time, as he states: "my whole success has been that I created [the illusion of] many beautiful women, but I never lost Danny" (La Rue 1987 73).

However, La Rue's performances did not solely focus on the alteration of clients' attitudes in the rarefied intimacy of the exclusive nightclub environment in which he felt he had to emphasise his masculinity in order to be accepted each night. His acts' potential to indicate how drag performance could facilitate rites-of-passage was demonstrated in his

performances in large venues playing to unfamiliar audiences. In this instance too, La Rue's influence can be understood via Lurie's elucidation of magical clothing and its ability to transform the onlookers' perception of the wearer. The theory can be further developed with reference to horror critic James Marriott's reflections on how such apparently 'magical' people can affect their surroundings:

> The killer tends to be closer to the supernatural than the insane […] and in his on-screen actions he defies natural law. He can move with absolute silence, appearing and disappearing apparently at will; even the spaces he inhabits take on supernatural qualities, with familiar houses turning into darkened labyrinths and screams inaudible to others only a short distance away. (Marriott 2004 192)

Marriott suggests that the "supernatural" or magical individual is marked by their willingness to cross socially-accepted moral boundaries (Ibid). Moreover, he suggests that their clothes signify their intent and conduct it towards the society even before they act, forcing onlookers to change their actions in response to the agent of the disruptive paradigm. Marriott suggests this causes environmental metamorphoses by virtue of the monster's image alone. In his example concerning the *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978) horror film series, the murderer, Michael Myers, wears a plain, dark jacket, and trousers that reduce the amount of light displayed during the scenes. They impose a dark and foreboding atmosphere on the world within the film.

The apparatus and effects of Marriott's observation are also applicable to drag, and in particular, to the performances of Danny La Rue. It extrapolates his role as someone who could cross patriarchal conceptions of boundaries of decency by establishing environments in which the communication of both genders was possible and acceptable, and could lead

others towards personal development.[188] This is particularly the case with his work in pantomimes. As his career developed, so too did his costumes; quite simply, the spectacle he created transported the audience into a fantasy realm:[189]

> Begowned and bewigged, he would step out regally on *The Good Old Days* or *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, twirling a parasol and singing in tones not quite male, not quite female either. Such was the era of post-austerity variety, though, that jaws dropped open willingly, if only in admiration of a second skin of sequins, lace and ostrich feathers. ("Beneath the Savage Breast" in *The Times*, 31st March 1995 29)

While this commentary refers primarily to La Rue's revue work, it is equally, if not more applicable to his pantomime roles. The so-called 'jaw-dropping' occurred when the audiences' conceptualised boundaries between anticipated gender presentation and their willingness to engage with the spectacle were reduced and they allowed themselves to become part of La Rue's performance, due to his sheer aplomb. As La Rue comments, time was built into the performance to allow the audience to marvel at, and give themselves permission to integrate themselves into, the spectacle in order to enjoy and contribute to the performances' atmosphere (La Rue 1987). It is a scenario almost akin to hypnotism – a word La Rue himself uses to describe his performances (Ibid 73). This 'hypnotism' combined with his costumes to completely transform the theatre. He gave the impression that he could ignore the rules of physics itself. The long trains he wore rippled and obscured the floor as he moved, and he wore a feather head-dress that lent him a graceful, bird-like quality. It created the illusion he could float on the stage, literally suggesting he

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[188] Cross-gendered representation lends itself to use with horror theory because many horror monsters are considered to demonstrate sexual dysfunction ("The Psychological Appeal of Movie Monsters", npg.).
[189] Le Rue reports that in 1978, one costume alone cost £7,000 to create. The photograph of this dress can be found on the sixth page of the inserted sheath between pages 96 and 97 (La Rue 1987).

could alter the buildings' very form where he chose to tread, and as a result of the clothing he had chosen to wear.
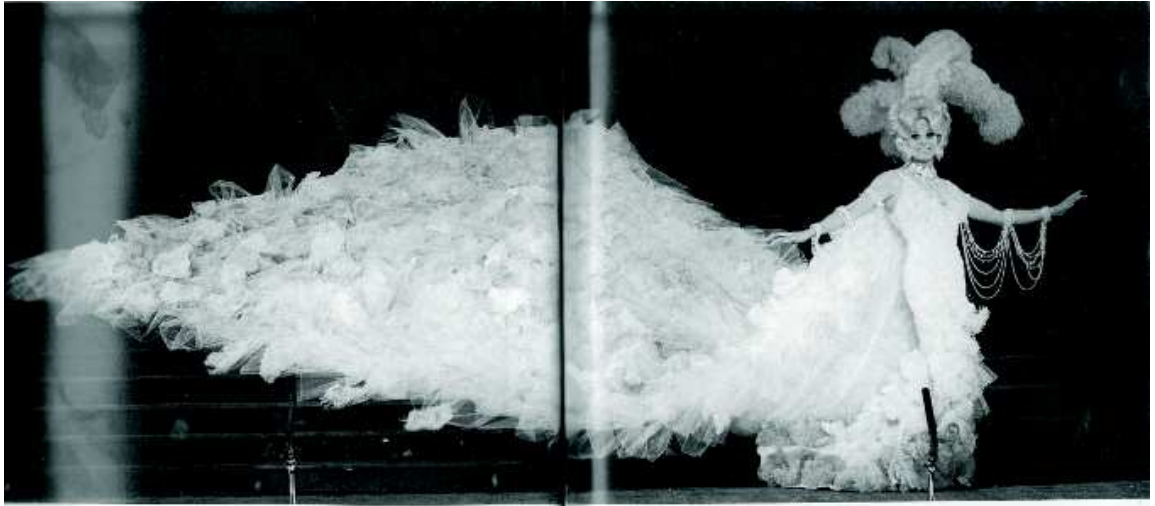
La Rue wearing a twenty-foot long ostrich feather train and elaborate head-dress. (La Rue 1987).

The entire venue was, thus, rendered fantastical. While he would interact with his audiences in his cabaret performances, he would not involve them directly in the performance unless they were themselves entertainment professionals.[190] Only in pantomimes were audience members encouraged to become part of the show by joining the performers on stage, and the majority of this interaction was limited to a section involving children. While this added to the children's enjoyment of the show and provided a memorable moment for their parents, it did not constitute transgression as the children were not expected to understand the bawdy double-entendres, and, therefore, did not cross any 'adult' moral boundary. Their

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[190] Audience members did 'cross the barrier' in shows in La Rue's night club as they were often entertainers themselves and would join in with the cabaret (La Rue 1987). This was perhaps more permissible as they too had crossed a divide: their talent has ensured at least the short-term immortality of their names and reputations, making them also 'super human' and 'magical'.

participation did, however, form a rite-of-passage, as they passed into the world of the fairytale alongside La Rue. On stage, the children knew they were being watched and that they were expected show their development by expressing themselves through completion of a simple task, often singing a song. They also knew they had to interact with the otherworldly La Rue, as the Pantomime Dame. La Rue's function in this fantasy environment was to encourage aspiration and prompt the children to present their personalities, integrate with fellow performers, and be charming and distinctive without behaving inappropriately. By doing so, they were also demonstrating their ability to look beyond La Rue's indeterminate gender to recognise and demonstrate civility, whilst also demonstrating to the audience (through their sheer guilelessness) that this was appropriate behaviour.

Despite these displays of apparent femininity on stage, La Rue was careful to present himself as male – as the use of his first name indicates. At the time when he was most active as a performer, there were no reports of him displaying feminine mannerisms when off-stage. However, some performers would cross La Rue's prescribed boundary by using effeminate mannerisms when they were not ostensibly playing a female character. These performers will now be shown to demonstrate the theatre's subversive potential to enable drag (and post-gay drag) to highlight different styles and behaviours – in this instance, 'camp' – and facilitate their acceptance and validation by mainstream society. This could, in turn, effect the mainstream public's perception of the individuality and sexuality of the performers. To appreciate how this was achieved, it is necessary to disambiguate 'camp' in order to ascertain how the associated performers ensured its cultural and educational importance.

As Susan Sontag's seminal essay, "Notes on Camp", illustrates, camp is notoriously difficult to define:

> To snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble. The form of jottings, rather than an essay (with its claim to a linear, consecutive argument), seemed more appropriate for getting down something of this particular fugitive sensibility. (npg., 1966)

Sensibilities are based on an interrelationship of cause (in this instance the persona) and its effect on the audience. Camp, as Sontag, rightly points out, is a "fugitive sensibility" as it practically defies meaning (Ibid). This is primarily because the effects of the sensibility are both aesthetic and emotive (Williams 1988). Therefore, its application is based on the following paradox, and definition becomes an almost contradictory project. To reach an objective definition of camp depends on each onlooker perceiving the same things as camp in the first place. It is, therefore, dependant on subjectivity and remains in the "eye of the beholder" (Babuscio 1977 41). To counter this paradox, Babuscio attempts definition through camp's applications: "the link with gayness is established when the camp aspect of an individual or thing is identified as such by a gay sensibility" (Babuscio 1977 41). One aspect of camp, therefore, is the performer's perceived association with homosexuality, which engenders "…a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression" (Ibid 40). Here, Babuscio is presumably defining "creative energy" or "heightened awareness" as the physical 'force' of camp (Ibid). This is a popular perspective: the instinctive understanding of camp is often considered to be a by-product of homophobic oppression to the extent that, as Tim Teeman asserts, active enjoyment of camp is an expected, almost compulsory aspect of modern gay-male identity,

as such perspectives assume that oppression is universal ("In the enemy camp" in *The Times*, 15th April 2002 17).

While Babuscio's suggestion is conducive to debate, Teeman's rather pessimistic perspective of camp shows its fallacies. It is easier, however, to understand camp and its mainstream popularity by side-stepping this critical and cultural peer-pressure! If accepting that the concept, definition and language used to describe camp evolved from performance, it is logical, as Medhurst points out, to define it in light of the performers held to exemplify it (Medhurst and Munt 1997). La Rue remains a useful study as he began to perform around the 1940s when the term first came into public usage to specifically connote homosexuality (*OED Online*, accessed 26th February 2007). Helpfully, he uses it to describe a scenario involving his co-stars:

> … [they were] outrageous. It was far too high camp for me. I was surrounded by boys who would literally have preferred to be women. They were happier as women; they lived in women's clothes for much of the time and they desperately wanted other people to accept them as women. They were so serious […] Many of them got to the point where they could have been girls, there was no reference to them being anything else, until the end of the show when they took their wigs off. I always thought it was completely and utterly revolting to see a man's head in women's make-up […] They didn't behave like women at all. There was far too much envy and jealousy amongst their ranks, and there was far too much noise when they all got together. (La Rue 1987 72-73)

La Rue's comments appear slightly self-contradictory, suggesting that his co-performers were at once like, and unlike, women. The distinction appears to be that while they largely successfully replicated female appearance and social grouping behaviour, they did not achieve the decorum traditionally associated with the so-called 'gentler sex'. Nevertheless, his comments do suggest that camp can be evident in cross-dressed performance. Indeed,

his own act has been described as a "camp deceit" ("A real class act" in *The Sunday Times*, 13th November 1994 28), and helped introduce the sensibility to the mainstream. However, he distances himself from his colleagues and defines their camp excesses through their continuation of their behaviour away from the theatre environment. In contrast, he resumed masculine signifiers during, and away from, the performance. His comment, therefore, pinpoints camp's genesis and meaning as an aspect of the performer's personal sensibility, rather than as a character they portray or the clothing they wear.[191]

Furthermore, La Rue differentiates himself from his co-stars by stating they were "high camp" (La Rue 1987 72). As the term is so allusive, literal discussion allows the semantics to speak for themselves. La Rue does not deny that he may be perceived as camp, but states that his colleagues were "too high" for him (Ibid). Photographs show him to be of average tallness, suggesting he means the other bodily measure of height – vocal volume and pitch - the higher range of which is associated with females. This recalls his comment that his co-stars created "too much noise" (La Rue 1987 73). Vocalisation is the thematic key to the issue. La Rue's voice is integral to his act. He is notable amongst other performers for his ability to convey a realistic impression of femininity; his appearance and his slightly gravelly, feminine vocalisation could be compared to perhaps eccentric female actors such as Eartha Kitt.[192] Indeed, he would often dramatically lower the pitch of his voice mid-performance to ensure he broke the female illusion, in contrast to his co-stars, who attempted to emulate the stereotypical female constantly. However, in their desire for "other people to accept them as women" (La Rue 1987 72), his fellow performers instead

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[191] Indeed, respondent Rayne (Anna Glypta) suggested that drag queens are not necessarily camp, and that if they lacked "sparkle", they might as well be female (2007c).
[192] In comparison to acts such as Hinge and Bracket, whose spoken delivery was noticeably shrill and unrealistic.

overcompensated and represented not a natural effeminacy or femaleness, but an emphasised mimicry of supposedly feminine mannerisms and, as a result, failed to suggest true femaleness – they would, presumably, be perceived instead as parodying women.

These two differing approaches to the representation of femaleness are important: to define camp sensibility on the basis of scale (as is suggested by variation between "camp" and "high camp", La Rue 1987 72) only works if the style of presentation remains the same, if variably magnified, in each instance. If the style changes, it follows that the performance cannot be defined using the same scale – simply because the product is made using different ingredients. This would suggest that La Rue's use of the term "high camp" (Ibid) is, therefore, a slight misnomer; his colleagues did not appear to display a believable femininity, rather a replication of its replication – allied to what Susan Sontag calls "camping" (npg., 1966). Babuscio has commented:

> Camp is often exaggerated. When the stress on style is 'outrageous' or 'too much', it results in incongruities: the emphasis shifts from what a thing or person *is* to what it *looks* like; from *what* is being done to *how* it is being done (Babuscio 1977 44)

Often, these incongruities are interpreted as the difference between the performer's rather ridiculous attempts at gender representation and their anticipated presentation. La Rue, on the other hand, created an illusion so realistic in comparison to what the audience knew was his biological sex and gender presentation that its denaturalisation had to be highly

performative to become effective.[193] His was the prime replication of natural ostentation and its denaturalisation – his performances were camp.

La Rue's rather vitriolic description of his co-stars conveys an undercurrent of the threat of 'camping' to irrevocably damage the personality by encouraging transfixiation on the artificially created performance persona.[194] His judgement of his co-stars' frivolous behaviour suggests the side-effect of such self-hypnosis was to exhibit hyperbolised, camp behaviour and negate one's dignity. Dignity is a concept allied to high position within patriarchal society, so to lose it is to risk losing one's social standing, and by fading into obscurity, one's very identity (*OED Online*, accessed 27th February 2007).[195] His fears of the pitfalls of being considered camp were well-grounded, as descriptions of his act vary wildly. Some described him as a "drag queen", obliquely referencing negative stereotypes of effeminate homosexuality ("Life's a drag" in *The Times*, 2nd December 1995 20), while others circumvented the term and its implications by instead calling him a performer of "marvellous impersonations" ("Not in the least bit saucy" in *The Times*, 9th January 1993 22). The former implies he is a pedlar of sexual jokes, suggesting that his act lacked cultural value beyond the approval of its target audience, while the latter implies he is a skilled vaudevillian entertainer whose act's very foundation in traditional theatre alone validates the cultural worth of his performances. Ironically, his concerns regarding such representation were the basis from which other performers would promote acceptance of effeminate homosexual-male bearing. In the documentary, *I'm Free! Inside The Comedy*

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[193] Nathan Lane's performance as Albert Goldman in *The Birdcage* demonstrates both conceptualisations of camp – the first when he is attempting with Armand's help to 'pass' as a heterosexual, the second when he convinces Senator Keeley that he is in fact Val's mother (Nichols 1996).

[194] This recalls La Rue's suggestion that his image was hypnotic (1987).

[195] There are frequent suggestions that La Rue may be sexist, as he commonly refers to the female performers he replicates as "[tarts]" (1987 94), presumably indicating women who were sexually available. This suggests he may not always represent the dignity of those women.

Closet (Boome 2004), La Rue's suit is replaced by a pastel-pink jumper and he holds a small, fluffy dog – an image reminiscent of the hyperbolic, romantic female. He used camp semiology to 'out' himself as homosexual. The scenario can be understood through Babuscio's comparison of camp with the horror genre:

> The horror *genre*, in particular, is susceptible to a camp interpretation. Not all horror [texts] are camp, of course; only those which make the most of stylish conventions for expressing instant feeling, thrills, sharply defined personality, outrageous and 'unacceptable' sentiments, and so on. In addition, the physiological issues stated or implied, along with the sources of horror, must relate to some significant aspect of our situation and experience; *e.g.* the inner drives which threaten an individual's well-being and way of life […] coping with pressures to conform and adapt […] the masking of 'abnormality' behind a façade of 'normality' […] personal rebellion against enforced restrictions…
> (Babuscio 1977 43)

La Rue used the one-off documentary to conquer his horror of how he would be perceived if his homosexuality was known by using graphic connotations to instead celebrate it. In doing so he also commemorated the life of the manager who had, all along, been his romantic partner, and who had recently passed away.

Camp "abnormality" (Babuscio 1977 43) was, however, the normative 'performance' face of Larry Grayson. Grayson was a comedian famous for presenting family-orientated television programmes, and who helped facilitate the social acceptance of camp homosexuality precisely because of the ambiguities inherent within his personal presentation. Grayson controlled the programmes' progress and would, therefore, appear masculine and patriarchal. Yet while he appeared masculine, dressed in a man's suit, he frequently gestured with his wrist held limply, a movement often held to connote homosexuality by suggesting 'feminine' weakness and the lack of interest in maintaining a

stiff, authoritative stance. In addition, he would occasionally heighten the pitch of his voice, sounding effeminate, comment on the television set's appearance and incorporate gossip (particularly about health issues) into his act. As Medhurst (2007) has commented, this is a continuation of a perception of male homosexuals, termed "Oscar's offspring" (after Sinfield's 1994 study of Oscar Wilde) as representing a "disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisured idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism" (Sinfield 1994 118). While Grayson's performance does not incorporate all of these attributes – "luxury" sacrificed in keeping with his working-class (northern) roots, he still reiterated a stereotype presented by previous characters and recognised as a signifier denoting homosexuality. To clarify this signification, he also used catchphrases such as "what a very gay day" in programmes such as *The Generation Game* (Hall 1978). While the word 'gay' has previously denoted happiness, its meaning had broadened to connote males whose enjoyment of each other's company carried implications of romantic (and sexual) liaisons, and, as a result, the phrase drew attention to his own sexual representation in line with the stereotypes accepted at the time.[196] Indeed, the names of the characters referenced in his performances were mostly double-entendres, if one chose to perceive them as such. "Pop it in Pete" the Postman put "things" through "[Grayson's] postbox" (suggesting he was the 'bottom' in anal sex); "Self Raising Fred" the baker was presumably skilled in causing erections, while "Everard Farquarson" was a "close friend" of Grayson, who could, the potential pun suggests (if reinserting the 'h' into Grayson's working-class northern accent) be "Ever hard" and ready to administer to the sexual needs of sons (*Wikipedia*, npg., accessed 22nd October 2006)!

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[196] An in-depth discussion of the definition of the word 'gay' can be found in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Grayson's use of this material was a direct traversal of the gender boundary into apparently effeminate behaviour at a time when homosexuality was less publicly acceptable, and yet one that maintained its public audience through the use of stories that could be interpreted as a quaint reflection of life in a close, traditional community.[197] While his verbal play, gestures and topics of discussion made Grayson appear fantastical and risqué, they also made his concerns seem extremely traditional; they were a text-book representation of camp as a

> …movement away from contemporary concerns into realms of exotic or subjective fantasies; the depiction of states of mind that are (in terms of commonly accepted taboos and standards) suspect; an emphasis on sensuous surfaces, textures, imagery and the evocations of mood as stylistic devices – not simply because they are appropriate to the plot, but as fascinating in themselves. (Babuscio 1977 43)

By astutely maintaining both aspects of the performance – and indeed jokingly admonishing the audience if they appeared to laugh at the crude aspects of his humour, he demonstrated that one could appear effeminate and yet retain one's dignity by remaining professional and in control.[198]

For Grayson, camp was the presentation of a gay persona over a heterosexualised body. He gained dignity by appearing comfortable within his own skin, literally enjoying his own ambiguities. Grayson's act educated its audience by suggesting that effeminacy, as a connotation of homosexuality, should be condoned by mainstream society as it could be

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[197] Most of Grayson's characters were modelled on people he had known in his youth in Nuneaton ("Larry Grayson – Look at the Muck on 'Ere! – Part Two", npg.).

[198] Audience admonishment was a familiar technique to vaudevillians. Indeed, Marie Lloyd was famously called to defend the morality of her songs. She presented several normally raunchy numbers innocently, then an innocent one so raunchily that the room apparently blushed. Her point, as with Grayson, was to prove that their humour was necessarily crude only if the audience chose to interpret it as such (*Wikipedia*, npg., accessed 22nd October 2006).

entertaining and, therefore, constituted a public service. Moreover, as "Larry Grayson" sounded realistic enough to be a legal name, the implication was that he was being himself rather than assuming a cursory character – such as Kenny Everett's "Sid Snott" (1981).[199] This in turn suggested he was not 'camping', but naturally camp. Lynn Barber has commented: "That's the whole point of these made-for-television personalities - they are not putting on an act, they are wholly themselves" ("Glad to be Graham" in *The Observer*, 28th October 2001 11).

It is important to note distinctions between supposed performances of 'coming out', or demonstrating explicit homosexual denotation, in less recent camp performances. As Medhurst comments (2007), it was considered acceptable to portray characters signifying homosexuality as long as this signification was not explicitly demonstrated. Therefore, Grayson had a female assistant and would refer to female 'acquaintances' in his act, theoretically placing himself in a context that referenced potential heteronormativity in spite of his persona. He suggested homosexuality through his humorous, camp delivery, but could not make it explicit and directly challenge the norms at that time. Indeed, while Grayson vocalised his appreciation of "nice boys", puns referencing the willingness to enact (rather than fantasise about) sexual acts become the names of his friends, "Pop it in Pete" and "Everard". These characters are situated as the active partners in allusions to his relationships. To use Medhurst's distinction, for Grayson to assert this desire himself would be to "[reconcile] the limp wrist and the stiff cock" (2007 93), directly reconfiguring by the insertion of assertion the ideation of gay male desire, and therefore notions separating male homo and heterosexuality. Grayson remained masculine and in control, but flaccid. Thus,

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[199] As it happens, Larry Grayson was his stage name. His legal name was William White ("Obituary: Larry Grayson", npg.).

his popularity was based on his personality – appearing to present a slightly risqué, gentle image.

Moreover, his cultural importance lies in the stability of his presentation, and how this was perceived by the audience. This scenario has been conceptualised as follows by modern camp presenter, Graham Norton:

> … [Graham] Norton […] thinks when you start on television you are wholly yourself, but then, over the years, you - the real you - change and age, whereas the television you is fixed for ever. 'So, you start off being yourself and then that becomes the act. I mean I used to be more like I am on television, off it - I don't think now I'm quite as full-on as I am on television, am I? But it is me. I mean I don't have to "find my character". It's just that's how I am in front of an audience. And I suppose it is a kind of armour. But I don't feel like I'm pretending.'(Ibid)

The important concept is that of being "fixed for ever" into a personality (Ibid). Grayson's presentation ensured that a perpetual question mark hung over his sexuality, and as a result he was continually conceptualised as a possible gay man at a time when there were few in public life.[200] He was fascinating; he was potentially breaking taboos as he did not appear to be 'camping'. Additionally, as respondent Anthony Rose commented, gay men engage in camp behaviour as a means of affirming their sexual identity when they first 'come out'. Grayson's trademark patter therefore represented the perpetual performance of a gay man enjoying utilizing the stereotypes associated with his sexuality and, importantly, enjoying the opportunities this offered. By doing this he was also able to reconfigure the public ideation of sexuality. As he wore a man's suit against an effeminate persona, he suggested

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[200] As "*I'm Free! Inside the Comedy Closet*" (2004) revealed, Peter Tatchell, spokesperson for OutRage! approached Grayson regarding his sexuality.

that the formal suit could be perceived as a gay man's choice of clothing. The two signifiers could interrelate: the flamboyant comic could mock the signifiers of the dignified suit, the limp wrist sabotaging its fine, masculine cut; while its monochrome colour served only to highlight the wearer's colourful personality.

The scene is reminiscent of Andy Medhurst's description of the process of 'wrecking' (1997). The laughter Grayson engendered was carnivalesque and developed from flamboyance that disturbed the heterosexual surroundings, glorying in the knowledge of its difference. The cultural shock this laughter heralds was the formalised cultural acceptance of the invitation to cross the boundaries.[201] Grayson's suits lent gravitas to their subversive wearer. He was no longer working as a drag queen on the LGBTQ circuit, nor being feminized by playing a subordinated, commentating role as Frankie Howerd might have done (Medhurst 2007), but was a success hosting prime-time family entertainment. His performance mimics the military definition of camp, as "[a] body of adherents of a militant doctrine, or theory. So to have a foot in both camps, to belong to or sympathize with two opposite groups, factions" (*OED Online*, accessed 16th January 2007). He did not betray his roots to popularise his performance. His career facilitated the presentation of a non-traditional sex-role persona, while at the same time enabling him to present a positive image of potential homosexuality to the mainstream – particularly as he never declared his sexuality publicly. No doubt aided by the concurrent social changes, it became increasingly permissible for a gay man to present as a gay man.

The wider acceptance of homosexuality within the mainstream has ensured the concurrent metamorphosis of the educational aspects of drag performance. Performers such as Paul

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[201] As is also documented in the third chapter of this thesis.

O'Grady now aim toward the overt examination of social concerns. O'Grady invented drag persona Lily Savage for financial reasons. As Savage, he was paid more to compeer a local talent contest, and it is this awareness of financial necessity that colours Savage's character and performances.[202] Her presentation is atypical of the mainstream female impersonator tradition: she is bold and brassy, and while O'Grady states the character is not an attempt to belittle or parody women, Savage's presentation suggests his claim must be tested in order to elucidate the character's educational function.

O'Grady's claim is in fact immediately supported by Savage's performances, as they are holistic and defiantly break with a number of the traditions associated with camp and drag, depicting a modernised perception of the sensibility:

> Irony is the subject matter of camp, and refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association. The most common of incongruous contrasts is that of masculine/feminine. Some of the best examples of this can be found in the screen personalities of stars whose attraction, as camp, owes much to their androgynous qualities... (Babuscio 1977 41)

The concept of camp illustrated by Babuscio is normally applied to gender disparity – wherein the presented image is at odds with the audience's knowledge that the performer is a (gay) man, (suggesting the character is the expression of effeminacy) and becomes humorous when the performer's female presentation falls short of realism. With Savage, this is not necessarily the case. Unlike Danny La Rue, O'Grady never breaks the character illusion and does not engineer the comedy to rely on contrasting references to his own

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[202] In her initial incarnations, Savage's style was close to the grotesque tradition of female impersonation as her costume consisted of rags. O'Grady has stated this was to differentiate her from other cabaret performers whose acts were technically poor impersonations of famous female singers ("Beneath the Savage Breast" in *The Times*, 31st March 1995 29).

biological sex. Indeed, when Savage obliquely references O'Grady's actual gender, it is primarily to draw the audiences' attention to her character development. For example, Savage comments "I was told I made a very convincing Nancy" during a production of the musical, *Oliver!* (Reed 1968). That the hard-bitten character could portray another poverty-stricken persona lends her performance plausibility, and also indicates O'Grady's own integration, as a gay man, into the tolerant theatrical environment. Therefore, initially, the camp incongruity of Savage's character is to largely defy expectations as to the nature of her act. She does not behave in the manner expected of a drag queen and instead aims toward the presentation of a realistic persona.

This realism is so imperative to the conveyance of the message that the act expands beyond the confines of Savage as a stage persona. In the first instance, this is achieved through the introduction of her 'daughter' Bunty, who enables a realistic mother-daughter squabble. Again, Bunty does not 'play' to the audience, but instead bickers with Savage, as if in private, to the extent that her mischievous asides are sometimes spoken in such realistically lowered vocal tones that they become inaudible. She is played by Sonia Evans, a Liverpudlian singer famous for her similarly cheeky persona and ready smile. The use of a female actress rather than a male actress acts to further suggest a realistic relationship, an effect developed as Evans also wears Savage's trademark partially-dyed, blonde, curly wig, presumably to suggest familial ties.

Furthermore, O'Grady appeared as Savage on television talk shows, effectively dissolving the boundary between the fictitious creation and the real world. To emphasise this, when interviewer Gaby Roslin asked questions using the third-person ("what will Lily Savage do next?"), enabling a response from either the actor or the character's perspective, Savage

answered in the first person (*The Big Breakfast* 1992). Similarly, "Savage's" response to the question "what will Paul O'Grady be doing next?" deflected this potentially illusion-shattering question: Savage admitted to knowing O'Grady, (who is occasionally referred to as her manager), but dismissed his importance by calling 'him' a "four-eyed fruit" (*Parkinson* 2004). By referring to himself in the third person rather than ignoring the question, O'Grady acknowledged the central irony of Savage as a drag persona, and ensured the audience's focus remained on the character. By handling the question in this way, he established that he did not wish to discuss subjects, including himself, that challenged the character's reality, and indeed he is not referenced on Savage's publicity material. He even enabled the character to be considered as an actress in her own right in the real world by appearing as her when acting as other characters in theatre productions. O'Grady presents Savage as a realistic character, and, importantly, one who can interact with the real social world.

Despite O'Grady's holistic performance, Savage is not presented as a woman in the style of male actresses such as Charles Pierce. Her depiction is instead intended to connote realism of personality, as demonstrated by her bouffant, peroxide-blonde hair, complete with visible roots. This references her construction of desirability in line with stereotypical female attractiveness, employing similar preparations to many biological women, and, as a result, connotes a deconstruction of cultural conceptions of feminine desirability. Savage represents a womanhood that does not naturally achieve its cultural expectations and is, therefore, physically altered by this perception of being culturally 'spoiled', as her alias "The Blonde Bombsite" suggests ("Lily Savage", npg.). However, the name is slightly deceptive, as indicated by O'Grady's performance, and the key to understanding the act is the subject matter and delivery. Savage speaks remarkably quickly into a microphone held

in a casual, off-hand manner, rather than projecting her voice to the audience. This creates the impression she is conversing with friends about life's irritations (for example, attempting to wash the dishes while smoking a cigarette) rather than being paid to amuse the thousands sitting before her. She is portrayed as a believable person with the same concerns – be they her desirability or the household chores – as her audience. As a result, the audience largely ceases to expect her to attempt to shock or amuse in the traditional manner associated with drag performance. Moreover, she revokes cutting remarks and rewards her stooges for their participation, creating the impression of a character hardened by experience, but who realistically evolves through her empathy with others.

By creating a realistic character who retains enough 'drag symbolism' to remind the audience that the performer is male, Savage can discuss issues pertaining to both sexes, or as O'Grady says "[she's] got a foot in both camps" ("Lily's a doll I play with" in *The Times*, 10th December 1998 21). The act's social agenda emerges when O'Grady uses his audience's affiliation with the character to counter stereotypes associated with the topical issue of poverty. The model of drag queen as a representation of 'bitchy' characters is relevant here in the context of Savage's social purpose as a drag act for mainstream consumption ("Camp followers" in *The Sunday Times*, 27th November 1994 27). The model is used to challenge perceptions of both misogyny and poverty. In *Lily Savage: Live at the Garrick Theatre* (1995), Savage introduces the concept that her family are necessarily prostitutes, and compares the profession to providing voice-overs for commercials with the comment "a girl's got to earn a living". As a result of this, she counters the suggestion that they are, therefore, unfeeling with the performance of a serious, sentimental song dedicated to the friendship they share in times of adversity. The song is delivered with her astride a stool in order to focus the audience's attention on the deprivation that supposedly forces her

to be present on the stage.[203] Finally, she counters the suggestion that prostitutes are necessarily sluttish by asserting that women do not generally orgasm during sexual intercourse. This statement is delivered in a depreciatory manner with her head tilted down at an angle, while her eyes look up defiantly at the audience, a frown on her face. Savage, thus, challenges the perception that prostitution is necessarily physically enjoyable, and indeed, that it suggests the woman's moral deficiency. By using the drag queen character to draw attention to sex and subsequently prostitution, O'Grady highlights the effects of poverty on a character whose holistically funny, sympathetic and caustic nature reiterates her basis in a normative humanity, and asks the audience to resist their preconceptions and judgement of those who present as she does.

Having established the social causes that contribute to Savage's presentation, O'Grady uses the character to advocate other issues. She recounts meeting Queen Elizabeth II at a shelter for homeless people, stating that the Queen asked a resident if they enjoyed their new accommodation (Ibid). Savage performs the 'reply', spitting the words in distaste, contorting her face, raising the pitch of her vocal tone slightly and increasing the speed of her speech to indicate impatience. She raises her eyes to indicate anger at being asked what her answer implies is a ridiculous and patronising question: "Yes, I do. I bloody love sleeping in this cardboard box, under this bridge and not having a home to go to or any food to eat; yes I love it". In this context, O'Grady (as a male actress) fulfils what Babuscio argues is a traditional interpretation of camp, as "through [an] introduction of style, aestheticism, humour and theatricality, [he] allows us to witness 'serious' issues with temporary detachment, so that only later, after the event, are we struck by the emotional

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[203] This performance recalls Babuscio's comment that camp irony is the performance of identity by those who face oppression (1977 41).

and moral implications of what we have almost passively absorbed" (1977 49). It is only too easy to believe that Savage may have been present at such a shelter, and her comments ask for the reassessment of others who have been in that scenario.

O'Grady's presentation of theoretically oppressed characters is not, however, totally sympathetic. While stating that many of the sympathetic aspects of Savage's character reflect female acquaintances, he has later commented that "her ideas are so warped, so demented, you could only get away with them dressed like that" ("Lily's a doll I play with" in *The Times*, 10th December 1998 21). Her views are not necessarily demented, but they do convey a mindset that society may choose to believe is unrealistic. They reflect O'Grady's own experiences of working as a youth-care officer and form a critique of Savage's validation of her own behavior (Ibid). Savage's tales of hardship, her values, her acceptance of her situation and her willing involvement of her family are self-stigmatising – and the audience's realisation of this are the real "emotional and moral implications" of the drag queen's act (Babuscio 1977 49). As Savage comments, just as her own mother provided her 'trashy' hairstyle by bleaching her hair when she was an infant (with the words "I'm not having a ginger-haired baby, get on that dye", *Lily Savage: Live at the Garrick Theatre* 1995), she has done the same to her own daughter, Bunty. Bunty's image, therefore, becomes poignant. Evans' trademark ginger hair is hidden, which denaturalises her own persona. Moreover, myth and legend associate ginger or red hair with anger, deviance, and leadership abilities – the latter of which could semiologically bestow the working-class child with revolutionary potential (Lurie 1983).[204] The audience's knowledge of Evans'

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[204] The aspirational political impact of the name Bunty could be connected to a girls' magazine available around the time that appears to connect to most of Savage's comedy ("Bunty", npg.).

actual hair colour ensures she remains associated with hope and the possibility of change (Ibid), even if this is subsumed by the blonde wig.

However, as with Savage, Bunty's hair's dark roots are visible in the blonde wig, literally indicating the impossibility of change as she lacks the inclination to maintain the appearance, let alone alter it. The good-will and humour that accompanies recognition of Evans is tinged with pity for the character she plays. Bunty's hair itself connotes her acceptance of oppression and the life of crime it may entail, as Halberstam comments: "Faces and bodies, in fact, mark the other as evil so that he can be recognised and ostracised" (2000 93). Bunty's hair establishes her social status to the point of obscuring Evans' otherwise famous personality. Perhaps these observations seem excessive, but this is O'Grady's point – society will only contemplate the politics of the social perception of underclass if expressed through the cover of a "warped" and "demented" persona ("Lily's a doll I play with" in *The Times*, 10th December 1998 21). Furthermore, O'Grady implies that the reality of self-oppression, and the onlooker's willingness to either completely refute or accept it rather than challenge it, is in itself "warped", as it merely allows the cycle to self-perpetuate. The poignancy of ironic camp is coupled with the denaturalisation made possible by drag to create a character whose comedy forms a critique challenging the audience's perception of deprivation.

The gender-boundary crossing performed by drag acts such as Danny La Rue and Lily Savage formed an oblique commentary on the way in which social roles and concepts of reality were changing. Their messages were, however, concealed due to the very realities on which they were commenting. La Rue negated the representation of the implications of his ability to portray both sexes by breaking the illusion to reassert the stability of his own

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masculinity mid-performance. Similarly, although the scenarios presented by Savage recalled O'Grady's own experiences, they could appear so fantastical when presented in a theatre by a cross-dressed comedian that their foundation in reality could become obscured. Moreover, as Savage does not learn from her experiences (repeatedly making the same errors, such as prostituting herself), the performance constitutes a lecture that doesn't provide solutions to the issues it raises.[205]

In recent years, however, drag performance's social commentary has evolved as a result of the increased availability of mass media and its impact on perceptions of social change. This metamorphosis is evinced by recent televised drag performers who illustrate and critique changes in English society using realism that is achieved "[not] by taking a camera and training it on a block for a week and calling it a film [, but by] mytho-poetics [, as] realism depends on artifice and fiction to create its narrative thrust" (Dyson 2007 12). Their popularity results from a perceived increase in the display of such "mytho-poetic" (Ibid) sensationalism, which Abercrombie and Longhurst have argued offers the audience increased emotional gratification (1998). These ideas are explored in the television series *Little Britain* (2003).

Little Britain (Ibid) is filmed in a manner reminiscent of documentary-style representation. This is suggested by the voiceover provided by Tom Baker, whose accent and delivery is dissimilar enough to those of the filmed characters' to recall Upper Received Pronunciation, suggesting the production will uphold the social values that were

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[205] Savage does not learn within the context of the singular performance. O'Grady has, however, stated that she moved to a convent when he retired the character (*Parkinson* 2004).

widespread when such intonation was more prevalent.[206] Furthermore, Upper Received Pronunciation was associated with economically prosperous and highly educated people, affording Baker the authority to describe and, thus, judge the presentation. However, this connotation is tempered; only parts of his delivery are reminiscent of Upper Received Pronunciation, while others are closer to the subsequent, and more widespread, Received Pronunciation that is associated with a wider range of economic attributes (Crystal 1997 36). Therefore, his voice indicates not only theorised changes in social mobility, but also that these social changes (as a result of being part of the presentation) are the programme's subject. His accent also suggests the challenges of authority as a result of its inherent democratisation.

Each sketch is afforded a simplistic, documentary-style introduction informing the viewer what they are about to see. As a result, the viewer's subsequent observations are guided, but they are immediately provided with the evidence upon which they can decide whether to challenge or accept the narrator's information. This apparent narrative transparency implies that while the programme consciously parodies social documentaries (as fantastical elements such as the projectile-vomiting older ladies demonstrate) it also reflects aspects of its host country's people and concerns, as seen by the programme makers. The instances where the narrator appears to present subjective or irrelevant information encourage audience analysis, highlighting and, thus, questioning the narrator's (and, therefore, the programme makers') reasons for presenting any apparently misleading perspectives.[207]

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[206] Whose casting is a pleasing presentation of irony, as he is famed for his tenure as the eccentric central character of the English television institution, *Dr Who* (1975).

[207] By comparison, presentations such as the drag segments in *The Two Ronnies* (1971) were presented against a quasi-serious newscast, which commented on the meanings of the display, rather than allowing them to become self evident. Unlike, *The Kenny Everett Show* (1981)*, Little Britain*'s (2003) apparent factual basis is not disturbed by the individual performers' personalities, as was the outcome of Kenny Everett's direct-to-camera, knowing asides.

The camera techniques and locations appear to attempt to present the characters' lives mimetically. They incorporate a non-intrusive, covert style, where filming is often initially carried out at a discrete distance from the action, suggesting the programme's participants are unaware of their observation by an outsider who will present their actions as sociological 'evidence', and are, therefore, interacting naturally.

However, Baker's often surreal and rude asides undermine and, therefore, question the comic-seriousness of the programme. *Little Britain* (Ibid) is indeed a fake, scripted documentary. Unlike other television series that use drag performance to comment on social character, *Little Britain* presents a perception of England that oscillates between a celebration of the memorability and individuality of the characters as archetypal English eccentrics, and, conversely, as objects of comic or horror-based ridicule.[208] In fact, the performances guide the viewer to question whether their own perceptions of the reality of other social groups and phenomena can be objective rather than the product of external (particularly media) sources.

The primary characters are sometimes portrayed as untraditional, non-aspirational, and, therefore, negative stereotypes, suggesting the programme's examination of their social ideologies represents a panicked moral critique positing the degradation of the once proud 'English national character' (Presdee 2000). *Little Britain* (Ibid) is not, however, a freak

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[208] Another such programme is *The League of Gentleman* (2001), which differs from *Little Britain* (2003) as it reflects a satirical perception of small villages (being set in the specific, fictitious locality of Royston Vasey) rather than being a self-conscious attempt to critique the variety of identities based on social and geographic categorisations.

show highlighting the foibles of a small number of supposedly eccentric citizens.[209] The supporting players, representing the rest of society, are portrayed by performers whose sex matches that of the characters, presumably to connote social realism. The comedy results from the eccentrics' behaviour and the supporting characters' uncertainly of how to react to it, and is highlighted by their visually contrasting appearances. The audience does not entirely identify with either set of characters, as each is demonstrated to be ludicrous from the other's perspective – a device that forces viewers to engage with the personalities, rather than simply to judge.

Indeed, the programme features a variety of characters. These range from an eccentric, flute-playing hotelier, to a transvestite whose actions and clothing only accentuate her maleness, and to wheelchair-user who jumps to his feel to complete able-bodied activities when his put-upon carer is not looking. While these characters are worthy of study, this thesis will focus on the issues illustrated by Vicky Pollard, Maggie and Judy (the latter being the 'Women's Institute' ladies). It is these characters who most clearly interrogate notions of otherness within the series. There are, arguably, characters that have had more impact on mainstream culture, yet these either offered too simplistic an analysis ("gay" Daffyd sees persecution as integral to gay identity) or did not, at the time of writing develop enough as characters (Emily Howerd's story-lines focused on her repeatedly self-sabotaged adventures as a 'lady'). However, all of the characters are illustrations of public concerns.

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[209] A concept recalling respondent Kerryn Davey's comment that drag performance encourages the audiences' acceptance of their own eccentricities or "little foibles" (2006n) through comparison with the 'deviant' drag queen.

One public concern portrayed, and therefore critiqued, is the perceived moral decline of the young. The character Vicky Pollard is depicted unrealistically in drag. This is, however, a conceit, as her behaviour is presented as being no further from the norm than that of her 'gang', played by biologically female actors, and few would contest the reality of the broad spectrum of behaviour, referred to as juvenile delinquency, that she represents (Presdee 2000).[210] She is often presented outside an unstylish, high-rise tower block indicating her reliance on low-cost, local-authority accommodation. She in fact represents the apex of this view as she has become symbolic of working-class 'chav' culture. Lucas' physique affords her a short, stout frame – connoting a lack of exercise and, therefore, potential laziness. Her acne possibly indicates the lack of a parent or carer to teach her social graces such as personal hygiene, while also denoting that she is a teenager making the hormonally turbulent transition from child to adult and is, therefore, likely to challenge the authority of her elders.[211] Moreover, she always wears a tracksuit; sports clothing of this type commonly displays the name of its brand (in Pollard's case, Kappa) demonstrating the commodification of a lifestyle. Its loose-fitting cut offers comfort rather than smartness, therefore connoting the wearer's snub of traditionally accepted standards of appearance, attitude and behaviour. Rather than contributing to the community or economy, her intention is to relax.

She also wears a significant amount of large, conspicuous jewellery, most notably sovereign rings. Her socio-economic background suggests this jewellery is what is known as 'bling', which is described by the *OED Online* (accessed 10th July 2006) as a signifier of

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[210] She is portrayed by the series' actor and co-creator, Matt Lucas.
[211] She also has long, ginger hair that is pulled into a half-ponytail on the top of her head. The significance of ginger hair has already been noted in relation to Lily Savage's daughter, Bunty, earlier in this chapter.

conspicuous consumption (Lurie 1983).[212] As discussed in Jones (npg., 2006), 'bling' is associated with African-Caribbean cultures and rap music, where the perceived symbols of (white) capitalism are redeployed within economically poor black cultures "as extensions of their economic vitality and the politics of machismo and virility". It can be summed up as: "the harder and bigger my diamond, the harder and bigger my influence" (Dyson 2007 52.), and is particularly where "all [have] been thrown by social circumstance and personal choice into a ghetto, a gang, a crew, a cell block, or a tribe or some other order" (Dyson quoted in Jones npg., 2006). As Dyson suggests, the very iconography of "bling" refers to the crimes that the oppressed commit as a rite-of-passage that facilitates their survival in a hostile environment, ensuring "a necessity is turned into a virtue" (Ibid). The wearer of bling, or 'mogul'

> …is the man of the crowd: at once immanent and transcendent, at once an insider and an outsider, at once everyman and the exceptional individual who provides the masses with a singular identity, a singular face, a mirror image of a sovereign collectivity that is now always in motion [...] Fully swept up in the multicoloured and polyphonic waves of modern revolution, he is able to channel their tidal fury towards higher and nobler ends: national sovereignty, liberty, empire, progress. (Smith quoting Schnapp 2003 85)

Bling, therefore, evinces social oppression, and, conversely, that the wearer has achieved power both in spite of, and because of, that circumstance. Therefore, Pollard is indicated as either having purchased inexpensive, low-quality jewellery to attempt to be perceived as part of (or "hide beneath") this subculture via "vicarious identification" (Dyson in Jones npg., 2006), or the jewellery is a bona-fide reference to the establishment of a cultural identity via participation in illegal activities. Either way, it represents post-gay drag –

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[212] The *Wikipedia*, community-approved, definition of "bling" is "the exterior manifestation of one's interior state of character, normally displayed through various forms of visual stimuli" (accessed 15th February 2007).

specifically the modern, English equivalent of *Paris is Burning*'s (Livingston 1990) 'Bangee' identity. It demonstrates Pollard's refusal to adhere to traditional social values.[213]

Pollard's reasons for refusing to adhere to these guidelines are highlighted by filming techniques: at times, the camera's height, angle and position convey scenes from the characters' perspective. This style encourages the audience to judge both the characters and the reality they represent. When 'watching' characters in 'realistic' scenarios, the camera hovers in a style similar to that used by real-crime television shows, indicating danger through the close proximity to the proceedings. Such shots restrict the audience's view of the scene, impeding contextual interpretation, and magnify the character's physical anomalies to suggest the representation of social truth. This presentational style, highlighted by Tom Baker's asides, reveals the series' social purpose and elucidates its subsequent phenomenon by suggesting that the genesis of the roles the characters perform (to observers either within or outside of the narrative) is their personality and is a hyperbolisation of their stereotype. Filming typically frames Pollard conversing with another party about a supposed misdemeanour – examples run the gauntlet from shop-lifting to smuggling 'class A' drugs. Her diversity of crimes parodies, and thus critiques, the objectivity of the social panic regarding the supposedly increasing immorality of youth.

In this vein, the sketch, "Trying to buy alcohol in a pub" (*Little Britain* 2003), features Pollard joined by her 'gang' in a public house where she attempts to order alcohol. The bartender, concerned by her groups' youthful appearance, asks for evidence that she is old enough to lawfully purchase and consume intoxicating liquor. As she is legally a minor, she begins her trademark denial of misconduct (incorporating a confused "yeah, but, no but"

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[213] For a further discussion of post-gay drag, see Chapter One of this thesis.

speech pattern) providing background information to justify her actions, but which merely demonstrates her disregard for the law. While Pollard's speech pattern could mark the character as fictitious, the opposite is in fact true. Series co-creator Lucas has commented that Pollard was inspired by a conversation he had with a similar youth ("Vicky Pollard", npg.). Julia Snell recounts Colt's contention that "[teenagers] talk in general is said to be highly expressive and vivid, and teenagers are said to use language as a means of expressing and evoking emotional involvement rather than for the communication of facts and logical ideas" (Snell 2006 62). Thus, Pollard is not only attempting to commit a crime (albeit a 'minor' one), but desires her aim so much as to assume that emotional blackmail will induce an authority figure with whom she has no kin relationship to comply rather than concur with socially expected behaviour.

However, the scene's visuals suggest that the situation is not presented in a purely damning light. Pollard is evidently not actually a child, and she is also clearly played by a male, which suggests the scene will not relay hyper-realism, but will focus on the absurdity of the image and scenario, making it comic. It adds entertainment value to a common rite-of-passage to adulthood, and signifies that the programme does not condemn Pollard's actions outright, but instead encourages mild, bemused amusement and admiration of her rather poor attempt at bravado. After all, she attempts to purchase the alcohol covertly, asking for it at the end of a list of other, innocuous purchases, presumably in the hope that the bartender will not notice. This suggests she is nervous rather than particularly delinquent. As is often the case when the narrative reaches her denials, the camera replaces the actor to whom she and any accomplices are talking, so that Pollard appears to be talking directly to the audience. In this instance, this denotes the barman's perspective, looking down on the rather comic posse; the verbose, frustrated Pollard and her gang of smaller females, who

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look silently and somewhat shyly up at him from behind her whilst attempting a rather poor impersonation of defiant depreciation. These children are terrors indeed!

For the actors, the camera angle would have the effect of both realising and derealising their performance. They are not simply pleading their character's case to the figure with whom they are interacting, in this case the barman, but also to the audience outside of the narrative. The close-ups on the gang also naturalise and denaturalise them for the audience, who witness the character talking directly to their faces. The characters are stripped from the wider settings and interaction that made them appear plausible, instead highlighting their hyperbolised nature, while paradoxically framing them in the style of reality television where the respondent records a journal on a camcorder. Such journals place the respondent in a potent power relationship with the viewer.[214] Their image fills the screen and demands total attention, providing them with the platform from which to prosthletise their viewpoints. However, the audience, being unable to focus on another aspect of an ensemble piece, may choose to continue watching or may instead reject the character and what they represent by changing the channel, even if this is only intended as a temporary measure. To do this is not only to take an artistic or moral judgement, but to attempt to deny the character's life, as Higgins states: "It is […] income that the entertainers and their managers and promoters chase, for, whatever rhetoric they might like to mouth about art, entertainment is chiefly a business and the stakes are high" (1993 241). If the ratings for a television programme do not match expectations, the show can be cancelled and its characters killed off. That *Little Britain* (2003) remains so popular suggests that the apparently negative aspects of the characters also have positive connotations – the audience

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[214] These journals are often confessional, alluding to their hopes and fears, as in the case of shows such as *Diet Doctor* (2005).

sympathises both with Pollard's gang and with the bartender, who stands his ground and, with a mixture of bemusement and amusement, refuses their request.

It must, however, be considered what this common scenario gains from the extremity of its inclusion of a character performed in drag. Why should the audience watch a programme with a focus on creating such extreme reactions? What effects will it have on them? What benefits do they expect to gain from it? The popularity of the series suggests that the audience is unlikely to be comprised solely of the viewers of 'intellectual' programmes such as *The South Bank Show* (1978) or the gender connoisseurs who might view the performances of The Duckie Collective.[215] Instead, it must be a much wider cross-section of the general public, and must have a wider worth than mere adolescent reminiscence. It must serve a further social purpose.

The presentation of the characters of *Little Britain* – and the audience's championing of them – is ambivalent. Particularly in the case of Pollard, this ambivalence reflects society's attitude toward a number of real people, the public reception of whose apparent triumphs and disasters equate to the ratification and public demonstration of a moral code. This is evinced by a comparison of the public enthusiasm for Pollard's character and presentation, and their reaction to Jade Goody (a contestant on the reality television programme *Big Brother* 2000). The premise of the *Big Brother* series is to place individuals from different backgrounds into living situations that enable experimentation with the development of social groups. Of the participants that have appeared during the programme to date, Goody is widely credited as having found the most financial success as a result of her involvement

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[215] Although *Little Britain* has itself featured on *The South Bank Show* (1978).

– which can be attributed to her Pollardesque qualities.[216] Like Pollard, she was portrayed as the very antithesis of an aspirational model: physically unattractive ("Jade Goody" in *The Sun*, npg.), uneducated, and grossly uncouth ("Jade Goody" in *The Sun*, npg.). Despite this, she was adopted by the mainstream as what commentators such as Caitlin Moran have referred to as a "pet chav" ("They're in Big Bother" in *The Times Online*, npg.), rewarded with lucrative magazine articles on her lifestyle when she acted aspirationally, yet chided when demonstrating theoretically uncivilised attitudes or behaviour (*BBC News*, npg.). Both Goody's and Pollard's fame (as opposed to popularity) grew the more grossly their respective situations were portrayed. The characters offered the viewing public the opportunity to enjoy passing judgement, thus ratifying new moral codes that were clarified the farther the character's behaviour deviated from them. In this sense, *Little Britain* (2003) is the modern equivalent of a public information film.

Such deviation from ratified moral codes recalls concerns that television reflected fears of the decline of social standards and depersonalisation (McQuail 1997). The supposedly negative connotations of the term 'depersonalisation' merit further discussion. In *Little Britain* (2003) the characters actually provide the audience with a method of handling this apparent threat. They present as stereotypes but counter depersonalisation as a result of their highly individual personalities. This is evinced by the availability of the character's background information, which in Pollard's case incorporates a catalogue of misdemeanours. She is, however, presented in a likeable, if comically preposterous manner, her pink tracksuit clashing with her ginger hair. The extremity of her image withstands depersonalisation. Additionally, her alternating, affirmative/negative "yeah, but, no but" catchphrase does not signify a lack of will or identity, but is an affirmation of the self

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[216] Jade Goody passed away on 22nd March 2009.

through the expression of thoughts and desires (Snell 2006) that enables her to demonstrate her a vast emotional range in a very short space of time!

Furthermore, the characters present the audience with case-studies through which to understand what life choices may otherwise lead to the depersonalised character. This is resultant from Pollard's representation as a drag character played by the short, rotund Lucas, rather than the tall, lean Walliams. Her build indicates her youth; she is short and carries what could be perceived as puppy fat. Moreover, her portrayal by a male ensures she is depicted as a biologically unrealistic character, and literally is not fully realised. This is in direct contrast to the characters she interacts with, whose biology matches their personae. Unlike them, Pollard has not bowed to social pressure to adopt either a wholly male or wholly female social role, but is trying aspects of both, and indeed sampling behaviours unassociated with her social class or ethnic group. Therefore, rather than her representation by a male rendering her as simply gross and 'unnatural', she appears young, willing to take risks, and is rather exciting. This personality enables her to triumph against the odds; in the sketch "Blazin' Squad definitely said she should come backstage to see them", she defeats a rival gang leader in an ad-hoc street dancing contest through panache and self-belief. The sheer fact that she is physically manhandled by her gang in order to execute her moves highlights the fact that the result is in no way to due to any semblance of skill or style, but emphasises the power of her personality to influence them. The situations the creators place her in demonstrate her refusal to adhere to social guidelines, while displaying a quirky personality that transcends the shallow 'yoof' stereotype. The audience feels affection for her as well as the horror of the fear of the delinquent that she represents. She demonstrates that the reclamation of decisions about identity and lifestyle may be beneficial and often should be recovered in lieu of those stipulated by society.

To choose behaviours that are not condoned by society is not, however, as straight forward as it sounds, and the programme demonstrates that some social expectations have in fact diversified, depending on the section of the community to which one belongs. Therefore, the transgression of some social codes may actually elevate one's individuality, countering depersonalisation, depending on the setting. In a number of scenes, Pollard appears eager to transgress anti-authoritarian social expectations (those to which her 'bling' suggests she would normally subscribe). In the sketch "Vicky Pollard: Magistrates Court", her speech is not confined to undermining authority to establish her power, but can be perceived as friendly when she advises the judge against accepting sweets from her acquaintance, disrupting the suggestion that her poor behaviour results from personal malice, rather than other social issues.

The comparison of these anti-aspirational characters to others with similar traditions and connotations explains why they are appreciated by the audience. Characterised by appearances (such as hair, clothing, and weight) that connote their social type, *Little Britain*'s characters are often described as grotesques, although they are not classical, Rabelaisian grotesques (Iswolsky 1984).[217] The body parts that connect them to the world are not the protuberances that connected the Rabelaisian body to the earth, but the parts through which their costumes and the performances of their actions indicate their representation of social figures and activate their connection to society. They are grotesque as they are ideologically expansive, converging on the boundaries of stereotype and representation of a recognisable individual. They can, thus, also represent the viewer at home.

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[217] Further discussion of the Rabelaisian grotesque can be found in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

The paradigm of the grotesque, unfinished body of the drag performer can be linked with Judith Halberstam's theory that gender-crossing enables the physical and mental transformations that create new bodies from old in the horror genre (2000). As demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis, this can particularly occur within liminal performance spaces that facilitate gender exploration. The drag performer becomes a funfair barker, ensuring the audiences' experience encompasses both voyeurism and the wish for vicarious practice. It is, however, a different form of vicarious experience to the glamour presented by La Rue, or the social paradigm offered by Savage, as James Marriott has commented:

> … [The horror genre provides] a set of oblique strategies for dealing with anxieties about everything from isolation, transformation, disfigurement, madness and death, to traumas we have already experienced […] and those we may have to face in the future. (Marriott 2004 2)

It must, therefore, be considered how the viewers use *Little Britain* (2003) as a strategy to manage these fears. In his critical work *Danse Macabre* (1991), Stephen King goes further to argue that horror provides the audience with the chance to formulate responses to issues of social concern to ensure they are psychologically manageable if confronted in real life, rather than in Marriott's (2004) apparent metaphor (see also Halberstam 2000). King (1991) asserts that horror consumers confront their own antisocial or non-conformist desires by vicariously living them through the genre's monsters' actions, as this enables them to test societies' boundaries to see whether 'the monster' or monstrous behaviour is defeated; temporarily subdued (while the society develops strategies for managing the risk the manifestation poses); or re-integrated into the community.

It is logical that the desire to test boundaries increases during social and personal change. This often occurs during the assimilation of new people and their differing behaviours into the culture, and the theory is readily applicable to Pollard, who reflects a society where previously accepted boundaries of gender, class, and law have become contentious. In the public house sketch discussed earlier, Pollard cites a person who would provide her with fake identification, indicating her awareness of her unlawful behaviour. She represents not a horror agency external to the community, but King's (1991) theorised Tarot card, The Werewolf, which personifies the uncertainly over the stability of accepted, if not necessarily lawful, modes of behaviour. Her activity in the sketch evinces the thrill of the danger of traversing these boundaries, which involve no long-term emotional repercussions. These thrilling emotions are what King refers to as "Dionysian" desires (1991) which Camille Paglia states are "[truths] for which society has a 'secret craving'" (Marriott 2004 2). While, La Rue and Savage dealt with anxieties concerning the destabilization of class and gender roles, *Little Britain*'s comedy emanates not simply through the issues the characters represent, but from the viewers' recognition of the proliferation of the characters' images and the ambivalent reactions they generate. The "secret craving" cited by Paglia (Marriott 2004 2) is a secret no longer:

> …the experience of actually watching horror films can be a lot of fun. Horror isn't just about confronting fears, but also channelling aggression: the genre often takes irreverent swipes at such hallowed institutions as the family, the church and authority in general and characteristically presents displays of shockingly anti-social behaviour that are invigorating to watch. If we are taught to revere social norms through our moral conditioning, horror recognises our resentment at being oppressed in this way, and allows us to revel vicariously in the violation of taboos surrounding everything from socialisation to toilet training. (Marriott 2004 2-3)

Little Britain puts the fun back into (im)moral education, and its camp irony evinces Marriott's statement. Much of the programme's humour is inherent in the contrast between the idealistic concept of the institutions and their reality, be they the family unit or the supposed 'liberal but fair' national character that praises patriotism regardless of the identity of the patriot.[218]

So closely observed is the social reality represented in the programme that it often requires little exaggeration to make its point. Indeed, the characters of Maggie and Judy (who appear to portray members of the Women's Institute) constitute one of the few instances where *Little Britain* exaggerates the stereotype to a ridiculous extent. Their sketches feature Walliams and Lucas in the realistic drag of older women.[219] While their guise connotes the nurturing, accepting behaviours associated with women, their maleness (indicated by their voices) is suggestive of patriarchy, tradition associated with their supposed ages. Maggie is vehemently racist and has a wide variety of other social prejudices. She attempts to hide the attitudes deemed unacceptable by the younger generation, but often fails, resulting in grotesque displays in which she projectile vomits over an item or person connoting the scene's otherwise genteel ethos. Graphic display is necessary to make the hypocrisy clear, and it is further evinced by Maggie's homosexuality, which, although still considered a taboo within her generation, she indulges happily until made aware that her companion does not wish to reciprocate. Her tradition places her in situations that are, for her, horrific, but at the same time introduces her to modern standards of behaviour. Her attendance becomes her own strategy for developing a new identity out of old ones, as Halberstam has

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[218] Rigby (2002) asserts that this concept of Englishness was in fact so ingrained that reviews of the early Hammer horror films bemoaned their genesis within the country.

[219] Indeed, they resemble Hinge and Bracket, who, as Baker has noted, were sometimes mistaken for female performers (1994).

suggested (2000). As Marriott (2004) posits, here the intrinsic relationship between humour and horror is demonstrated as the production allows the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour to be examined by referencing all emotional connotations. This ensures the character's acceptance or refusal of the social boundary they have crossed is conclusive.

An interesting comparison to the development of the horrific is found in the alternative approaches of those wishing to establish or ratify the text against existing boundaries, and those who want to critique them on their own terms. Higgins has commented that moralising against such acts makes the boundary-breakers "seem more subversive than they really are" (1993 241). Those who consume horror with a ratifying, moral agenda can, therefore, witness subversion and reaffirm their own identities. The subsequently conceived moral lexicon suggests a personal and social danger for boundary transgressors that appears ideologically greater than it actually is. Taboos are, after all, created by being named and brought into being within this prohibitive cultural context. Alternatively, audiences who critique such texts may use them as coping strategies to handle current change, rather than ignoring it and the future risks it poses, and the action undergoes a reversal. Rather than focusing on the intellectual senses, the message is represented visually and is, thus, accessible to a wider audience who utilise 'gut' instinct to test their ability to assimilate the extreme images into their paradigm. As Alfred Hitchcock has commented, response to this type of stimuli reminds the audience of their prejudices and their nature as subjective human beings (Marriott 2004). It provides a litmus test through which the audience can establish whether they are willing or able to understand why they find particular images (and the concepts they connote) unpalatable. This becomes particularly apparent considering the actual images that visual horror offers its audience.

Horror designates a space where the 'other' can exist while the characters attempt to deal with taboo subjects. Sometimes, the audience will simply reject the image. It is in this respect that the images of *Little Britain* appeal to a variety of audiences. As Higgins comments: "Most performers and promoters strive to maximise the audience that they reach and as a consequence project a sufficiently ambiguous set of messages to reach the widest possible number of punters" (1993 243). Anecdotal evidence suggests that *Little Britain's* audience varies from school children to broadsheet journalists (judging by the number of articles that have been written on the series), presumably all watching with different intents. The programme's categorisation and satirsation of social taboos and eccentric cultural types, represented by the likes of Pollard and Maggie, also provides its audience with the means to perceive these types as 'other', effectively overlaying the horrific, subjective perspective suggested by the documentary style with the fictionalisation inherent within the text itself. This enables the audience to remove this 'other' from their paradigm, conversely, whilst accepting the characters into their social space, where they can instead be treated as partial fictionalisations, fact mixed with conjecture – the equivalent of an arachnophobe handling a toy spider.

Alternatively, Higgins has stated:

> Entertainments are not real life: they do not mirror the world in every detail or with much accuracy. They are constructed according to styles and conventions which are part of the shared understanding that can exist between all those involved. They often pander to our worst emotions; they allow us to believe that happiness can be achieved or that men and women have a power to shape their destiny which in reality they rarely possess. (1993 242)

In this view, the middle-class, educated audience is expected to believe the show merely pantomimes the underlying social reality, using the comedy to categorise the threat as ridiculous, enabling them to distance themselves via self-conscious analysis. Alternatively, McQuail has stated that such display can also serve religious or political needs (1997). The nature of these needs must, therefore, be determined. The term 'censorship' – that which must be hidden, references what is shown in order to utilise its censure to commodify its negativity, and *Little Britain*'s (2003) very popularity has been presented by some as evidence of a degeneration of culture and the arts. This accusation is often levelled at 'non-intellectual' programmes that do not appear to offer self-improvement. *Little Britain* presents no substantiated information as per a documentary or news-based programme, and no 'serious' drama through which to interrogate the human condition. Its only cultural value could be perceived as being a post-modern social reflection. To assert this implies a divide between the public who view the programme as entertainment, and a self-appointed 'intellegencia', and in this sense the programme's graduate writers intend that *Little Britain* could be interpreted instead as a televisual bogy warning what future 'cultural degradation' could entail. As McQuail comments, there is a perception that television can lead to "addictive disassociation from reality [and] reduced social contact", as, while offering some participatory activities (namely the cognitive processes necessary to engage with its images) it is essentially passive and 'empty' as an activity that offers no quantitative material or intellectual gains (McQuail 1997 12).

However, the programme can overcome this intellectualisation through its educational process. It 'others' each viewer into the social stereotype most applicable, whether this is represented by a drag character or not! The boundaries the characters then transgress

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deconstruct the very notion of 'otherness' through representation alone. The drag queen, grotesque and ignorant (yet resourceful), Pollard appears no more ridiculous than her black, male suitor. He vocalises Received Pronunciation and has a penchant for according her respect by calling her "Victoria", a formalisation that signifies the manners resultant of education. This suggests he is able to cross cultural boundaries to create opportunities, yet chooses to be with her and confound a double set of social expectations. The audience indulges in the couple's behaviour vicariously while they laugh at the juxtaposition, encouraged by a modern morality wherein "[they] sometimes like the feeling that they are being liberal, tolerant or enlightened" (Higgins 1993 242). If tempted to dispute show's essential reality, the grotesque elements that connect each horrific 'other' character to the wider social world will confound any notion of the audience's own 'normal', stable identity. After all, who in the audience can escape some commonality with a character who is black yet is socially grouped with someone white, appears poor but has the means to be rich, is young yet has the maturity to show respect and make his own decisions, and who appears male yet has the consideration to appear romantic and, therefore, female?

The multicultural characters of *Little Britain* (2003) are important in the context of gothic horror in light of Halberstam's (2000) theorisation of the changeability of the body, particularly in the context of the body as a product of society. Characters sustained through public and, therefore, financial backing can develop within the time-frame dictated by their continuing popularity. This prevents the horror of these new found identities and sexualities from condensing into what Halberstam calls "an identity of perversity, in relation to a particular set of traits" (2000 88), as may have been the case in more traditional drag acts. When characters develop an "identity of perversity", they are often prevented from developing further, as they become ciphers for generalised anxieties rather than specific

behaviours or contextualised thought-processes, as in King's model of The Werewolf Tarot card (King 1991). Characters that can develop beyond this identity, however, can reflect societies where identities incorporating aspects shared across cultural groups can in turn generate new personae. Within comic frameworks, they are able to accept and challenge orthodoxy, their excuse being the protestation that they do not intend to offer serious analysis. As a result, the drag horror character is both the saviour and the death of the viewer via their reabsorbsion within the theorised collective body of the people as represented within the programme.

Indeed, Pollard's utilisation of (black) urban, gang culture, is strikingly similar to Halberstam's description of the classic gothic monster, Dracula:

> Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science, and psychopathology. He is monster and man, feminine and powerful […] he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the consummate gaze but is scrutinized in all things, he lives forever but can be killed. (Halberstam 2000 88)

Dracula gathers his life-force through living cultures, yet does not destroy the culture or person from which he takes, but dilutes the strength of his victim's personal motivation. His is omnisexuality as reflected within a consumerist culture. In *Dracula – Prince of Darkness* (Fisher 1966)*, actress Barbara Shelley was given the following direction by Terence Fisher:

> …Fisher instructed her to play the vampire woman as a totally sensual being. "When you're a vampire", he told her, "you're neither heterosexual nor homosexual. You go after anything that's not nailed down". (McCarty 1995 91)

This represents an identity composed of a sexuality that becomes a signifier for all of the other aspects of the personality. The audience's appreciation of Pollard's aggregation of a sexual identity (composed of supposedly 'receptive' white and 'dominative' black aspects) subsequently produces further 'monsters' – in the audience - resultant from the categorical activation. The monster becomes a basic consumer product. It provides a radical new way of utilising the technology of modern society, based ironically on the attempt to gain the previously enslaving social mobility. Pollard's sex does not enslave her; she actively uses both hers and her boyfriend's sexual stereotype to activate new methods of self-conception. The programme, in contrast to Butler's use of the text, "transforms metaphors of otherness into technologies of sex, into machinic texts, in other words, that produce perverse [in this instance, non-stable] identities" (Halberstam 2000 89). In other words, Pollard normalises the appearance of otherness itself by destabilising the very norms it is developed in relation to.

However, this suggests that in *Little Britain,* all identities are potentially perverse, appearing to contradict Halberstam's subsequent theorisation of the vampire as an othered identity:

> But the otherness that Dracula embodies is not timeless or universal, not the opposite of some commonly understood meaning of "the human". The others that Dracula has absorbed and who live on in him take on the historically specific contours of race, class, gender, and sexuality. (Halberstam 2000 89)

Halberstam's use of her "commonly understood" meaning of "the human" is, however, contentious (Ibid). When the human image is used as a signifier of the human race, it can indeed represent the universal. It is commonly accepted as a physical given through which

the philosophical reality of the universe is rendered quantitative. All humanity is condensed

into the model of 'Mankind', which is theorised (particularly in secular societies) as being

able to impact on, and exert some control, over the universe. The 'other' can control the

universe. Halberstam's following statement illustrates the concurrent appeal, and dislike, of

Little Britain (2003):

> The foreign sexuality that confronts [the viewer], then, depends upon a
> burgeoning definition of normal versus pathological sexual function which
> itself depends upon naturalising the native. (Halberstam 2000 89)

Little Britain's impact depends on its documentary style revealing not the horror of the

country, but the use of horror to mask what is considered to be the norm, or "native"

(Halberstam 2000 89). The programme does not suggest that the boundaries of civilisation

are crumbling, but rather that perception of these boundaries is unrealistic.

Indeed, the placement of characters such as Maggie suggest a cultural bridge that can be

traced back several generations to the world wars, when national identity was defined

through organisations such as the Women's Institute. These organisations established

behavioural standards that everyone was expected to live by, rather than being focused

particularly on class or status. *Little Britain*'s characters demonstrate the effort necessary to

suppress other characteristics, particularly considering the concept of "naturalising the

native" (Halberstam 2000 89). The term 'native' has colonial implications suggesting the

replacement of traditional ideals and behaviours with another in order to enforce the latter's

model of social normality.[220] The replacement process suggests that there is no universal

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[220] As Halberstam notes, Stoker merged pathological sexuality with foreign aspect (2000 90).

concept of natural, but a model developed around adaptation to change. Halberstam, therefore, states that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Riquelme 2002) is

> "[a] machine text" […] a text that generates particular subjectives, we can atomize the totality of the vampire's monstrosity, examine the exact nature of his parasitism, and make an assault upon the naturalness of the sexuality of his enemies. By reading *Dracula* as a technology of monstrosity, I am claiming a kind of productivity for text, a productivity which leads to numerous avenues of interpretation. (Halberstam 2000 91)

Little Britain (2003) also "generates particular subjectives" (Halberstam 2000 91) resulting from its host, consumerist society. It is not performed in a night club by a drag queen distanced by her appearance and stage setting as an 'other', but is instead a mainstream, comic programme praising (albeit it in a rather backhanded way) British identity.

To reiterate King's comment, horror concerns our ability to cope with change, particularly a change that has consequences for the way in which the viewer perceives their own identity (1991). The primary negative outcome that a horror film can elicit is the loss of the character's identity. To adapt King's example of the werewolf, it is the person unable to transform back, or the person who does so with full knowledge and regret of the deeds he committed whilst in that state. The type of horror offered is either physical or mental dissolution, preventing the individual from achieving equilibrium again afterwards.[221] For the viewer to partake in an 'othered' form of national identity, as presented by *Little Britain*, is to perceive oneself in a role one had previously othered and considered monstrous. In '*Little Britain* culture', this is not a theorised difficulty but an actual process of identity. The viewer must learn whether the identity reflected through their culture and

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[221] For an alternative perspective, see Marriott's chapter: "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" (2004 153-166).

expected of them is capable of surviving in different scenarios, and whether indeed their own predisposition enables them to accommodate, and be accommodated by, that which they consider monstrous.

This emphasis on the individual's predisposition is of utmost importance. The use of the horrific grotesque in mainstream entertainment is a metaphor for the debate of whether human nature itself is based on natural, often biological, occurrences or nurtured behavioural patterns. The debate cuts to the heart of every concern relating to the human condition: the extent of choice, and under what circumstances choices change. In the context of drag as gender, the choice is whether to examine Dionysian (King 1991) truth and experiment with mutable genders in the hope of revealing a potential holistic or evolved sexuality, or whether this course of action causes the individual's destruction through neurosis or social rejection.[222] After all, as *Little Britain* demonstrates, the aspects of gendered identity available to the individual are limited only by the ideas accessible to them. Lack of control and over consumption can, however, overpower the individual, and damage links to the parent culture, just as Dracula's (Riquelme 2002) over-consumption causes him to be vanquished by venturing too far into human territory.[223] In *Little Britain* this is most clearly represented through Emily Howerd, the transvestite, whose consumption is not only of an alternate gender, but of a historical perception of gender that conflicts with other social expectations, often resulting in the shattering of her female image through subsequent embarrassments. The horror of *Little Britain* can be described using Rigby's generalised comments on the nature of the genre, which appears to be

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[222] To extend this argument in relation to the second chapter of this thesis, the divide between more explicit notions of supernatural (and therefore potentially shamanic) cravings and neurosis has, McCarty (1995) argues, been examined through Romero's *Martin* (1977), in which the anti-hero substitutes a hypodermic needle for fangs in order to draw blood.
[223] Christopher Lee commented that he built the character of Dracula with this perception of the control and power in mind (Marriott 2004).

"reinventing ancient images of madness, decay and death" and patching them on to the traditional conception of the English as having "civilised values and a well regulated society" (Rigby 2002 11).

Little Britain's ideas are spread via the characters marketing, for, as McQuail suggests, the very nature of what the concept of the audience, and their role in what he calls "the mass communication process" actually entails is important (1997 1). As McQuail comments:

> The audience for most mass media is not usually observable, except in fragmentary or indirect ways. Hence the term *audience* has an abstract and debatable character [...]
> Audiences are both a product of social context (which leads to shared cultural interests, understandings, and information needs) and a response to a particular pattern of media provision. (1997 2)

While it is hard to quantify the audience who consume *Little Britain*, this statement interrogates the notion of what the audience is, particularly in terms of the style in which the show is consumed; the constraints placed on the events' "own customs, rules, and expectations about the times, places, and content of performances; conditions for admission" (1997 3). Although McQuail's comments concern Classical Greco-Roman audiences, they are nevertheless important in this current context, as they relate to the background of the performance and, thus, directly impact on the way in which it both reflects on, and can change its host society. Today, the mass marketing available would suggest that it has value for a variety of audiences. The audience's reality of a stable identity itself can become mutable, particularly using Garber's appropriation of queer semiotics in the wider context of the use of clothing to access forms of behaviour that are considered as other by specific social groups (1997).

As co-creator and performer David Walliams has commented, the characters of *Little Britain* are based on his and Matt Lucas's encounters with the general public ("Little Britain: Character Guide", npg.*)*. The actors generate recognisable character stereotypes, providing them with catchphrases or movements that highlight the grotesque trait they use to place themselves above the rules of society. In doing so, they have highlighted a new form of British identity whose popularity is based on the comic appreciation of transcendence of boundaries. These simplistic performance denotations are conveyed easily by a profile photograph. It effectively creates an identity brand. Moreover, the concepts connoted by these iconic behaviours (if not always the behaviours themselves) can be easily emulated. A child can repeat Pollard's "yeah but, no but" catchphrase and extended, illogical background defences to indicate that they perceive the structures that those in authority may seek to impose on them as being utterly irrelevant as a result of their subjective desires and, therefore, an unjust intrusion into the way they wish to live. It is the attitude of the character, rather than a direct replication of the characteristics, that make them active and recognisable.

By recognising the programme's effect on mainstream culture, the characters themselves develop to represent alternative strands of aspirational national identity, as the self-conscious, defiant title suggests. Its merchandise actually promotes characters such as Pollard as national icons who have redefined the communal norm according to their own standards – those of reinterpreted English eccentricity. As a result, they actually transcend the horror genre because (despite their previously othered, monstrous form) they are not altered or "redeemed", which Marriott states are common genre outcomes (2004 253), but instead gain absorption back into society functioning as they are. Pollard's name and face

are emblazoned on key rings, and the show's live performances fill middle-class theatre venues. Britons are actually encouraged to emulate these figures.

This cultural acceptance has resulted in a reconceptualisation of national identity based on evolution rather than tradition – focused more on behaving the way one wants with aplomb than behaving the way tradition expects. It is opposed to the notion of 'Little England', which has connotations suggesting a people firmly entrenched in their own ways (*OED Online*, accessed 1st May 2007). The situations in the series are not always a repetition of the same instances in different formats, but are adapted and evolved. The grotesque indicates that the show functions not only as a moral compass, but as a playful commentary that experiments with taboo and popular culture. As Halberstam quotes Moretti to rightly point out, in relation to the literature of terror "the metaphor is no longer a metaphor: it is a character as real as the others" (2000 105). Tom Baker's asides include anecdotes of the ways in which he/his character has factually interacted with the programme, such as by referencing his career in relation to the show's events. Baker is both the presenter and that which is being presented, "[he] is the boundary, he is the one who crosses […] and the one who knows the other side" (Halberstam 2000 89). This is the other main use for his Received Pronunciation. In addition to providing an authoritative-sounding voice for the proceedings, he gains some of that authority by demonstrating that he himself has transgressed the boundary between fact and fiction. More importantly, this suggests that England is a nation of characters capable of transformation, and who are all, to other social groups, grotesques.

Mainstream drag performance throughout the Twentieth Century has presented a form of social critique. The world wars and the subsequent gender reassessments that took place as

a result of massive social changes influenced the drag performance of Danny La Rue and Larry Grayson, who demonstrated the individual's ability to transmute the public essence of gender. Subsequently, acts such as Lily Savage utilised the cover of camp comic performance to seriously critique other aspects of society, such as the class system. However, it was not until the advent of popular programmes such as *Little Britain* (2003) that critique became a prominent function of the performance rather than an undercurrent. The drag characters in particular have been used to constitute a debate on the social construction of identity in a society concerned with an increasingly multicultural character. The actions of its characters can be shown (via theories related to the grotesque) to form a serious discourse as the utilisation of horror theory asks the viewer to respond to, and critique, their own social aspirations.

Conclusion

This thesis begins with the hypothesis that drag performance engenders social commentary as a result of the components that inform its practice. Queer Theorists, particularly followers of Judith Butler, would likely agree with this notion. They may, however, question how this hypothesis could further develop understanding of drag performance. The answer is that this study is not a roll call of individuals who have used gender subversion to challenge their social structure in the short-term. It does not recount tales of females wearing trouser-suits in the attempt to gain equal treatment in the work-place; neither is it content to demonstrate how a drag queen's representation of femininity can question essentialist perspectives of gender. Such research has been done before (Newton 1979 and Taylor and Rupp 2005, in particular), and while these case studies developed our knowledge of the phenomenon, they did not place the performance in its wider social context, or hypothesise its impact on the wider community. This thesis offers several original case studies. Moreover, it begins with an examination of the respondent artists' evolving self-conception within their community. It is developed through an analysis of their social function as performers to a variety of audiences and culminates in an examination of drag performance's role in the mainstream media. As a result, its over-arching contribution to the fields of drama and Queer Theory result from its definition of the social and theoretical process through which drag performance develops, as this enables it to influence the mainstream's conceptualisation of identity. This study, thus, demonstrates how drag performance can be an educational tool suitable for facilitating reflexivity in the entire society.

The performance mediums studied in this thesis demonstrate the huge variation in style and context inherent in the modern drag queen's act: from appearing on floats at carnivals, to cabaret performances, to compeering community evenings, and extending to the representation of serialised television characters. It was, therefore, essential that the rationale ensured each type of performance was holistically investigated.

As the cabaret performances in homosexual community venues are the performance environments most under the control of drag performers (and, therefore, the most likely to reflect drag's inherent traits), this was the first sample group to be investigated. The performers were interviewed and their self-professed aims for the show, together with analysis of their live performances, were compared to the writings of critics in the gender-performativity field. The initial aim was to establish whether the performers and theorists considered the same themes, and indeed whether these were evident in the performances.[224] This would establish whether the mediums were suitable for comparative analysis.

In the first instance, the criticism evaluated is that of key exponent, Judith Butler. However, it would have been unrealistic to attempt to prove a causal link or lineage between Butler's theories and the community performances because her often complex tone is far removed from everyday parlance. Her theories can also be inappropriate for direct comparison with performance as her style is often abstract, lacking the reference to social existence and emotional thrust that runs through many drag presentations, particularly when a significant proportion of these are emotional reactions to perceived intolerance.[225] In any case, her

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[224] Distinction is made between the performers and their performances as a result of instances where their stated aims were not those predominantly ascertained from the audience reception of the live production.
[225] The respondent interviews of Kerryn Davey (2006a-n), Anthony Rose (2006) and Chloe Poems (Potter 2006) all confirm this assertion.

arguments (though relevant) primarily concern the semiological development of social gendering (Butler 1993). This thesis, on the other hand, is concerned with the way in which drag performance can be used, either implicitly or explicitly, by the performers as a tool of social critique, rather than as an indicator of whether gender is essentialist or social constructionist. As a result, Butler's direct relevance to sections of this work is limited.

To cover this theoretical 'missing link', the work of theorist and performer Kate Bornstein became a major resource. Often complying with Butler's theorisation of the social activation of gender, Bornstein's anecdotal, often-colloquial style added a human perspective to the process. Her work also pre-empted a number of topics that were to feature in respondent interviews, such as the desire to educate the community, and the performers' attempts to understand and develop their sexual and social selves (Bornstein 1994).

However, a major sub-current found across all of the respondent interviews was an unspoken anxiety concerning the changes and challenges inherent in the gender-development process itself.[226] Whether respondents became defensive of their presentation (Rose 2006), or appeared to be consciously – though no doubt sincerely – vocalising an ideology that supported any outcome of gender experimentation (Rayne 2006a-c), it was clear that their self-presentation out of drag, and thus their acceptance into the LGBTQ community, impacted significantly on their drag personae. This was caused by their perception of their community and, conversely, their perception of its perception of them. The origin of this concern at @D2 is the disruption of the stable, non-heterosexual identity

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[226] Respondents were not challenged or asked further questions in some such instances, as to knowingly cause distress could be seen as unethical behaviour and a breach of their respondents rights (Gilbert 2005).

that results from the mixed-sexuality environment. The performers' attempts to understand themselves in comparison to LGBTQ stereotypes challenges their self-presentation, causing the reassertion of their perceptions of their own sexual identities as an integral part of their performances. This is significant as it is indicative of Queer Theory's relevance, and indeed prominence, outside of academia. Respondent Davey denied any prior knowledge of the genre, yet articulated the working processes of Butler's main gendering theories (2006 and 1993) in her observations of her interactions with the venue's clientele. Similarly, Rose was aware and, indeed, wary of extreme applications of this theory in reference to the cultural feminisation of homosexual males. Rather than simply understanding these issues, their performances aimed to challenge what they considered to be their audience's misperceptions of the possibilities of LGBTQ identity. This was done both in the guises of their primary drag personae and as their secondary, cabaret characters. Indeed, these characters performed the very aspects of the gendering process that the respondents seemed concerned about: Rose's rancour at – and challenge of – the expected feminisation of gay men was demonstrated by his portrayal of an assertive femme-fatale and performances as a male character. Similarly, Davey, whose homosexuality had been openly questioned as a result of her feminine appearance, challenged expected gender presentation using a feminine, lesbian dominatrix persona as well as drag king roles.

In addition, these identities were performed with an accompaniment of popular and humorous songs that demonstrated the potential (if comically hyperbolic) functionality of 'queer' relationship possibilities. These were shown in a variety of social frameworks that evaded stereotypes and stereotypical conclusions. Theirs was not an abstract presentation of 'gender for the theorist', or a 'conscious statement of discourse', but a hyperbolised actuation that showed characters living and playing with butch-femme possibilities in a

normative setting, which, as Davey stated, was their conscious intention, and was demonstrated by the costumes and staging of the routine.[227] The notion of performance is itself part of this process. The drag artists aim for their audiences to perceive them as 'real' representations of LGBTQ identity when both in and out of drag, in the same fashion that the respondents of *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990) used the term.

They do, however, make the distinction that their audiences have to accept the sexualities presented as they themselves understand them, rather than as a stereotypical replication of LGBTQ identity. The research finds that both the audience's and performers' enjoyment of the performance resulted in the acceptance of this drag image, which in turn begins to affect the audience's perception and acceptance of the performers. Repeated projection of these non-stereotypical images creates a new cannon of sexual models that are shown to the audience in this playful, if didactic, fashion.[228] The performers, thus, reconfigured their own self-perceptions and measured their success at educating their audience by the audience's reaction to the confidence and believability of their performance. This demonstrates Queer Theory's potential to impact on society beyond academia by showing how its themes can be performed by non-activists, such as the performers of @D2, and those whose prime concern is their social exclusion, as with the respondents of *Paris is Burning* (Livingston 1990). Drag performance, thus, can convey sophisticated dialogues in an extremely user-friendly manner. In addition, their performances demonstrate how Queer Theory is a continuously developing body of work outside of academia that offers the possibility of developing understandings of gender and the social environment at this grass-

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[227] The phrase 'statement of discourse', implies a performance that challenges the stereotype by focusing on the individuals' attempt to embody it in its original context and attitude. An example of this is the work of performance artist, Joey Hateley.

[228] As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, this is demonstrated by the rise in the customers' romantic advances towards the performers.

roots level. It also has the potential to affect the external, local community as a result of the performers' and audience's interactions in that environment.[229]

Continually, the theories of Bornstein (primarily 1994) and Butler (primarily 1993) guided this thesis' rationale. The genesis of the respondents' concerns about gender development lay in their perception of their variance from heterosexual social frameworks and images, which they investigated, leading to the comprehension of their LGBTQ sexuality. To continue to function within society, they found other, non hetero-normative frames of reference, in this case the LGBTQ community. Joining a community involves reappraisal of one's contribution to society, as Jay and Young (1992) correctly assert. As this study demonstrates, when communities focus less on procreation, intellectual contribution often takes its place. As the existence of LGBTQ sexuality challenges the universal validity of compulsory heterosexuality, the prime intellectual pursuit is, naturally, understanding the philosophical implications of gender. The respondents and other performance artists featured in this thesis incorporate these observations into their performances. Their presentation challenges accepted gender possibilities, which Butler terms "a resignification of the norm" (Butler 1993 126). However, as Bornstein observed (1994), such queries could engender the contestation of other socially-accepted belief systems, leading the respondents to encourage their community to question gender presentation and social expectation in the wider context. She quotes Scoop Nisker, calling such performers "The Great [Fools]" - "[those] who [make] visible the lies embedded in culture" (1994 92), a role suggestion validated by the actions of this study's respondents.

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[229] The effects of drag performance are, however, dependant on the environment in which the performance takes place. This is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis with reference to The Duckie Collective's performance of *C'est Barbican!*

In addition, this thesis develops Bornstein's assertion that LGBTQ performers become both spiritual and political leaders within their communities, what she terms "shaman" (1994). Considering the term's religious connotations, it was essential to examine Bornstein's theoretical model and the implications of this for LGBTQ potential shaman, in order to ascertain whether such a title was appropriate. Doing so would also enable investigation as to whether Bornstein's thesis should be clarified or developed to provide a greater understanding of the role and its function within LGBTQ (and possibly mainstream) society. This was particularly the case as Bornstein repeatedly refers to the religious aspects of the role in her discussion. Anthropological evidence does not, however, assert necessary disqualification from the shamanic category for LGBTQ people on the basis of their lack of shamanic beliefs, or indeed their lack of any religious beliefs at all. Studies of various communities presented shaman not as holders of a universal belief system or practice, but as people who led community functions (Flaherty 1988). The roles' core purpose was to act as the communities' spiritual guide, mediator and political leader. All of the respondents in this thesis performed these core functions – providing their bodies as a mediation for spirituo-philosophical influence (Edelsson in Carlson 1998), and by representing and, thus, helping to develop their communities through attendance at carnivals and other functions. In addition, three of the respondents stated that their spiritual interests were an integral part of their lives, and Anna Glypta (respondent Rayne) actively considered her performance and sexuality to be a representation of her beliefs (2007c).

However, Bornstein appeared to contend that transgender people are most suited to shamanism (1994). While this theory concurs with evidence that traditional shaman participated in cross-gendered activities to gain both the male and female experiences that

enabled them to mediate on behalf of the whole community, it is, however, at odds with Nisker's (and thus Bornstein's) notion of the great fool as society's Devil's Advocate. To suggest the transgendered are the only 'true' shaman implies ratifying them as the highest evolved being.[230] It is a position based on conjecture, and ratification without conclusive proof that leads, ironically, to the acceptance of another "cultural lie" (Bornstein 1994 89), however holistic it may seem. In addition, historical English cross-dressing included the performance of religious plays, as well as the instigation of civic protest. There is no evidence that the performers themselves were transgender. It was their willingness to play the role that engendered liminality, enabling them to alter their physical appearance to ensure they could appeal to, and thus guide, their community effectively. Therefore, it is a mixture of aptitude for the role and willingness to understand other perspectives that are the mark of the shaman, and the mark of the LGBTQ spokespeople represented in this study and elsewhere within the modern community.

To test the hypothesis that drag performers can be community leaders necessitates establishing whether a random sample demonstrate any messages through their performances. Venues with clientele ranging from patriarchal heterosexual, to mixed, and to predominantly LGBTQ were chosen to establish whether a variety of drag performances contained such a message, and if so, whether it varied according to the host communities' lifestyles and tastes. While fieldwork showed differences in the content and style of the performances, emancipation was a recurrent theme, although its transparency and detail appeared to correspond with the performers' perception of their audiences' levels of

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[230] It cannot escape notice that Bornstein is herself transsexual, though now considers herself transgender; neither male nor female (1994).

receptivity. The more liberal the anticipated audience, the more proactive the performance was likely to be.

Proto-feminism was illustrated in the predominantly heterosexual, but mixed-sexuality, working-class venue, The Birdcage. As illustrated with reference to Charney's (1980) theories, the performers in female roles used comedy to didactically implore the female audience members to assume an active role in their relationships by utilising the opportunities offered by exploring, and indeed exploiting, their femininity. While these performances linked female success with male involvement, this was in fact a pragmatic approach considering the client group. By cloaking simple suggestions for change in the most continually visually outrageous and flamboyant (and theoretically more fantastical) performances in this study, the performers illustrated ways in which the female audience members could increase their personal freedoms.

In contrast, while @D2 is officially a mixed-sexuality venue, the majority of the clientele are homosexual. This was reflected in the entertainment. While effort was made to ensure the performances were entertaining, they were also more transparently political, theorising by demonstration how non hetero-normative relationship models could occur within the LGBTQ community. Providing these LGBTQ relationship models with visibility acted as advocacy on their behalf.

Alternatively, The New Penny's drag queen (Anna Glypta) encouraged the predominantly LGBTQ audience to represent, and thus celebrate, their own relationships on the stage.[231]

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[231] The New Penny's drag queen also acts as a facilitator in the external community and is a prominent member at charitable and governmental level.

While these original and varied English case studies are, themselves, an addition to the knowledge base of Queer Theory, they also provide insight into the continual growth of the LGTBQ community. This is both in terms of its self-conception and, as a by-product, its physical viability in the local economy. This is illustrated by the productions staged, as well as the audiences who attend and support them. Indeed, the performers appear to perceive a conflict of interests between the communities' self-perception, their own aims, and their business viability. This ambivalence questioned what the performers truly hoped their performances would achieve. For while the LGBTQ community continue to be associated with oppression, self-conscious politicisation within their performances nevertheless had to appeal to a broad audience range or be camouflaged by populism. The respondents suggested that overt politicisation was rejected by large sections of the community who appeared to perceive it as an obstacle to the normal running of their everyday lives. Furthermore, most of the respondents were unaware and apparently uninterested in the LGBTQ movement's history, despite its persistent coverage in the LGBTQ media. However, issues such as intolerance and discrimination are still clearly relevant, as several respondents spoke of incidents in which they had been targeted.

Yet in a community whose common identity is sometimes disputed, continual, assertive politicisation is perceived as a threat to their acceptance into their local mainstream society. As a result, these regular cabaret evenings at predominantly LGBTQ venues are a consolidation, rather than an assertion, of their community. They recall the inversion of Rorem's (1987) thesis of the essential invisibility of LGBTQ identity by providing a place where the respondents challenge oppression in a space affording safe visibility, allowing them to meet with, and develop, their community. That these refuges are filled with the glamour, populism and raucous humour so closely associated with drag performance was

surely key to their continued theoretical and financial success. They ensured the performers could inform their audiences of the benefits of difference in the long term.

Consequently, a logical inversion of this theory is evident in this thesis' conceptualisation of the overtly politicised performances of Chloe Poems. Performance artist Potter's interviews, together with his performances, demonstrate him to be the most politically vocal respondent, but then, he can afford to be. As his performance was part of a one-off showcase, his act did not rely on pleasing audiences in the manner required of the other respondents. Indeed, in interviews he commented that his primary aim was to affect, rather than entertain. Nevertheless, while Poems' poems were progressively provocative, intentionally or not, they were performed through a variety of different narrators, facilitating the retention of the audience's trust in the prime character. As a result, potentially contentious issues such as sexuality were viewed from perspectives more likely to engage the audience's empathy. This is a tactic often utilised in political dialogue.

Thus, all of these diverse performers functioned to radicalise their audiences to varying degrees by conveying their messages through the performances' superstructures, rather than through their particular elements. While the radicalisation of early LGBTQ theatre has largely dissipated, its influence reverberates through the modern conception of the personal as political. This establishes commonality that can increase the likelihood of the messages' reception as a result of the audiences' continual presence.

While these performances filter messages into mainstream society via the interaction of their audience (who act as carriers) they are not the LGBTQ community's only method of influencing local relations. Drag performers also lead the LGBTQ Pride carnivals, and this

thesis establishes the precise effects of these events through analysis of the theories that underpin their physical and emotional elements, as these are the key to their subversive influence. In doing so, it provides Queer Theory with a contextualisation of the carnival's role in the development of the modern LGBTQ community. For while the performers themselves may appear unaware of the form's heritage, the carnival's appropriateness as a tool of political theatre is based on its inherent properties.

In the first instance, Rorem's (1987) theorisation of the invisibility of homosexuality was inverted to substantiate this thesis' claim that the carnival parade challenged homophobia by proving its existence through the performance and celebration of LGBTQ identities. However, as the carnivalesque performance of homosexuality is led by the drag queens rather than by males in supposedly male attire, it refers to Russo's (1997) feminist critiques to argue that the drag queen's appearance ensures the event also represents an inversion of the male stereotype, and thus patriarchy and heterosexual sex-role structures, to enable a cultural re-birthing. Using Russo's theories in conjunction with Bakhtin's (Iswolsky 1984) conceptualisation of the material bodily principle, it argues that a primary function of the carnival is to facilitate the physical and psychic regeneration of the LGBTQ community in a process equating to a physical expression of Bakhtin's concept of loop wording (Iswolsky 1984). The drag queen represents the physicality of LGBTQ desire and invites the audience to participate in the communities' growth through the creation of statements of intent that can be challenged and discarded or developed through mimicry. The normally 'othered' drag queen's parade is treated with respect which focuses the audience's attention on the lower bodily stratum, and, thus, concepts of regeneration. The focus on regeneration through persons not traditionally associated with heterosexual patriarchy lends the event a playful and fantastical liminality, which encourages others to join in the celebration within

a theoretically safe space. This, coupled with the events' celebratory aspect, directly contributes to the evolution of the concept of sexuality itself, for it invites the attendees to question their perceptions of gender and sexuality, and the role these play in their personal fulfilment.

This enables the parade to become a multifaceted depiction of modern sexuality that can directly influence both the LGBTQ community and its relationship with the mainstream. This is, in itself, a theory that can be applied to the use of all carnivals as tools facilitating community cohesion. While the drag queens' representation of gender is essentially psychic, in that drag queens aim to give its impression, rather than replication, they can nevertheless empirically affect both their audience and the surrounding environment. The spectacle of drag queens parading through cleared streets inspires a fascination that encourages viewers to pay attention to the parade, to notice the role models it offers, and, possibly, to follow the route. This may lead them to experimentation at the parade's conclusion, which can expand and diversify the community.

This thesis argues that this liminal atmosphere also engenders the carnival's longer-term effects. While raising awareness and encouraging the growth of community may be laudable, it may be unsustainable if provisions are not available for its long-term support. In some cases, this support may simply be the local authorities' agreement to allow a community to continue to function, the lack of which was the cause of The Stonewall Riots. Recently, the attempt to gain support has, more often, crystallised in the community's attempts to co-opt the government into an active development of their rights. As a result, a large part of the effect, and likely the aim, of the LGBTQ and other carnival parades, is to enlist the support of government agencies to ensure legislative protection by enabling the

participants to cast-off their previously 'othered' status. This theory has ramifications for the whole of the social sciences, as is the case with a wide variety of performative events, from the Orange Marches of Northern Ireland, to the Notting Hill Carnival in London. However, it is important to note that the sense of disorder inherent in the carnivalesque has also been utilised by LGBTQ grass-roots activists to challenge the aims of the carnival itself. Rival activists acted out their discontent and subverted the organisers' power to challenge the community's own institutions, attempting to force the organisations to develop or flounder. As a result, the carnival offers a mechanism that enables the constant redevelopment and rejuvenation of the communities' personal development and social needs.

While the LGBTQ community have utilised the carnival format to press for legal changes and provide an area that temporarily facilitates sexual experimentation, it also co-opts mainstream media to challenge oppression by using drag performance to critique the attitudes that promote it. This study offers the first ever critique of the development of televised-drag performance alongside its cultural implications. It highlights the central paradox of much mainstream-drag entertainment – the audience's reaction to the characters. When a character is comic, they encourage engagement, while the cultural taboos of homosexuality and transvestism they represent reject it. Both combine to make the style enthralling. This is drag's secret weapon: its ability to aid performers and the audience in the deconstruction of the concept of otherness itself. This method of deconstruction is important as it is not merely noted by academic trend-setters in pursuit of irony, but is also able to pass complex messages directly back to the mainstream.

As this thesis demonstrates, drag performance crossed into mainstream entertainment as a result of Armed Forces cabaret troops who continued performing following decommission. While it has been suggested that audiences attended due to a mixture of patriotism and desire for escapist entertainment (La Rue 1987), the productions provided a method of exorcism for social anxieties. These were the fear of mortality and changes to the social expectations of gender that resulted from conscription. Watching male, former soldiers entertaining in female attire entrenched the notion that drag performance could in some guises be respectable, while also representing taboos that allowed the audience to quantify their fears. This service brought them high regard that enabled acceptance, and indeed the respectability enjoyed by entertainers such as Danny La Rue.

This increasing popularity of such acts gradually permitted the performance of characteristics - such as camp - that connoted homosexuality rather more transparently, particularly through figures such as Larry Grayson. As a result, their remit gradually moved beyond the covert representation of sexuality and towards the depiction of wider social concerns. These performances used the comic value of drag to critique other aspects of identity. In the case of drag character, Lily Savage, this issue was social class. While her portrayal was not without warmth, Lily's performance constituted a critique of the characters she represented. Indeed, the performance's reality was itself enmeshed into a fictitious biography in which the character had to take what she considered to be degrading work in order to survive. As a result, her performance questioned notions of social victimisation and deprivation, but did not suggest how it could be resolved, either by the character or by the audience.

The current development of drag's mainstream critique is the examination of the notions of victimhood and otherness from both the side of the sufferer and the perpetrator, as can be seen in the television programme, *Little Britain* (2003). While this programme informs the audience of its supposedly factual roots, its obvious comedy highlights its fictitious basis to encourage them to analyse and establish its truths and fallacies and, thus, deconstruct the concepts of otherness its characters represent. While the issues are portrayed grotesquely for comic value, their power depends on their ability to reflect modern perceptions of the social world. The character of Vicky Pollard is shown to follow Stephen King's (1991) formula of horror representation, as she signifies concerns regarding the increase in youth crime and the breakdown of civilisation. Ultimately, however, her developed, if comic, persona suggests these fears to be the embodiment of concerns over the uncertainty of potentially changing standards of social acceptability and whether the community can (or is willing) to adapt to embrace such alteration. What is more, in a manner modified from Halberstam's (2000) theories, this theory suggests that Pollard's portrayal demonstrates how individuals can manage change by borrowing from other cultures to engineer circumstances amenable to their own development. In this instance, modern media physically enables the creation of Halberstam's conception of a new body created from an old one (2000) as it allows the character's popularity to become objectified within the market.

The show uses the media to reflect its sociological message back into the populous, so that (by enticing its audience through its promise of comic otherness and escapism) it consumes them and they are themselves evolved. The particular character aspects are then enabled to become representative of this new chameleon brand, thus enabling viewers to literally buy into the image and the notions it carries. This is an important finding as it can be

generalised to create a blueprint for other causes; it does not formalise its differences by isolation, but suggests they are merely part of a spectrum of behaviours.[232] This is not to state the programme aims to convert its audience to any particular viewpoint. Its effect is to encourage the viewer to consider how prejudices are formed, and whether these prejudices are appropriate or, indeed, could mask behaviours that could prove useful if adopted. It turns its audience into Little Britain.

Thus, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, the different types of drag performance combine to form a process of political theatre. At its inception is the individual who develops the performance of their sexual persona in relation to their community to understand their own gender perception and counter social stigma. This act starts a process of re-evaluation of other socially accepted behaviours and ideation. Their performance environment enables them to lead their community towards similar understandings, in a shamanic role that has spiritual as well as practical ends. Their realisations develop into cabaret performances that reflect the concerns of the community, but importantly are also tailored towards the aesthetic and intellectual desires of their respective audiences. However, true to the role of the great fool (Bornstein 1994), the LGBTQ shamans' task is to communicate this message beyond their community. Thus, the LGBTQ performances are taken into the sphere of the heterosexual majority via the carnivals that aim to challenge their viewers' perspectives of their own sexualities, utilise civic protocols to increase LGBTQ rights and develop infrastructures to support the community in the long term. Finally, the platform is moved to mass media, where the LGBTQ shaman challenges the

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[232] A similar approach is taken by the disabled performance artist, Mat Fraser, whose disability resulted from his ingestion of Thalidomide during his mother's pregnancy. While Fraser's acts focus on the 'normality' of his concerns, this sole reassertion can actually increase the idea of otherness brought on by the audience's unease with Fraser's frankness. Such acts become photographic negatives of so-called 'elephant in the corner syndrome'.

formulation of otherness itself. Whether or not gender is a semiological, social construction, drag can be used as a tool to engender reflexivity in, and challenge the perceptions of, society.

While this thesis has covered many diverse theories, further research is necessary to enable our understanding of the brother performances of drag kings.[233] As has been seen, drag-queen performances have changed considerably over the past fifty years. Originally, they were primarily conceived as a method of expressing one's sexuality politically, yet a number of the respondents of this study became involved following a rite-of-passage wager or because of the potential financial rewards. They are, however, thematically and visually different from drag king performers. Drag kings remain iconographic of vastly different feminist perspectives, and research is needed to discover how and if the two trends can continue to impact on mainstream politics.

In addition, much work within the field of drag kinging is currently completed by those who remain at the top of their academic field by developing gender-based theories, such as Judith 'Jack' Halberstam. It remains to be seen whether, as in the drag-queen movement, this has any similarities with grass-roots level drag kinging, which often develops from the discovery and enjoyment of the sexuality or quite simply having fun, often before acquiring a level of apparently unlaughing seriousness in some performance circles. This seriousness, a lack of carnivalesque mockery, might be because the performance is resituated as a direct expression of the individual's perceived gender role. For example, Joey Hately and Del La (formerly 'Della') Grace Volcano both now identify and appear other than female, while a

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[233] This phenomenon is briefly explored in the performances of respondent Davey in Chapter One of this thesis. Davey, however, performs as part of a drag-queen troupe.

number of others (such as Judith 'Jack' Halberstam) project extremely masculine imagery when not performing in drag. It may be the case that in such scenarios, carnivalesque mockery is replaced by the desire to reaffirm such other-gendered aspects of self. Indeed, it is intriguing that the only male drag performer at @D2 to perform an entirely serious dance piece, dressed in a revealing costume (and who declined to take part in this study) later identified as transsexual. While it is certainly not the case that all drag kings identify as either transsexual or as butch lesbians, it is notable in the instances where individuals product work for both groups and on their own, the level of comic imagery increases in the troupe situation. Maybe this is because it is easier to laugh at the less-socially acceptable aspects of your identity with the support of like-minded people, rather than to risk laughing solely, and possible be laughed at, by yourself. Further research may tell.   .

This thesis has utilised performance to examine social conceptualisation of the possibilities of human relationships, the body and the way in which the society in which we live is fashioned. It goes, almost, without saying, that this is one of the main concerns of academia. The challenge for the future will be to recognise and utilise the choices available to us, and make informed decisions that can develop our society. The proliferation of non-stable gender performance could indeed impact on other types of cross-dressing such as non-LGBTQ festive drag, long-term transvestism and female-to-male transgendered display, which have not featured heavily in this thesis due to aim of focusing on drag performance itself. The author's own further research will examine the tension between the emotional individual and the construction of their sexuality from the concept of the working body, as that which has to produce (theoretically or physically) in order to be able to achieve self-definition. It will examine the promise and indeed the terrors that the

potential for unlimited sexuality could bring – and indeed, will attempt to understand what implications this has for what is considered to be 'human'.

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Appendices

Primary Respondents: Sourcing and Biographies[234]

Ethical Procedures

Appropriate ethical practices, particularly those regarding respondent's rights, were observed each respondent's case. Each respondent was provided with a letter detailing their respondent rights, such as their ability to leave the study at any time, to withhold information, and the details of the appropriate bodies to contact, should they wish to complain about their involvement. They were also given (and had to complete and sign) forms consenting to participation that indicating whether any of their details should remain private.

Each interview was recorded by Dictaphone to enable accurate data-use and researcher reflexivity. The researcher did not interact with the performers while they were at the venues unless approached, so as not to disrupt their duties. Only variations from this approach will be detailed in the individual respondent's biographies, below.

Respondents:

Davey, Kerryn ('Mingeeta Lickolotopus')
Sourcing: The researcher met Davey a number of years earlier, having attended the same school before leaving the area. The researcher contacted Davey after discussing the study with a mutual friend who remained in contact with Davey and knew that she was part of a drag performance troupe. The mutual friend gained consent and passed Davey's contact details to the researcher at her request. The researcher contacted Davey by telephone and arranged to travel to Nottingham and live with Davey (at the latter's suggestion) for the duration of the fieldwork exercise.

Biography: Davey was a twenty-five year old, Caucasian female living in Nottingham. She grew up in Boston, Lincolnshire, and had attended a girls' grammar school. Both the town and the school has a marked tendency towards conservatism of attitude (eighteen-year-old 'A' level students required a parent's note to leave the premises during school hours and the few known LGBTQ citizens were generally treated with caution, derision and minor violence). Davey was artistic, enjoying painting and dancing, and had an interest in psychology, magic and spirituality. She had several, long-term relationships with boyfriends during her teenage years, but moved to the city of Nottingham after completing the sixth form. She chose not to attend university and instead found work within the caring services as a psychiatric nursing assistant.

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[234] As access to the drag performers was often controlled by the venues that employed then, it was not always either ethical or possible to interview them in-depth because this would take their focus away from their work. As a result, prominent performers such as Miss Orry were not interview extensively.

She began to attend homosexual-run public houses with friends and began to work at @D2 as a barmaid, at the time recognising her lesbian sexuality. She was initially greeted with suspicion and hostility by the female clientele on the basis that she did not conform to their expectations of lesbian appearance: she had a feminine figure, wore clothing to compliment her physique, and wore her wavy, auburn hair level with her breast bone.

Davey joined @D2's drag performance group originally because one of the other performers was unable to attend at short notice. She was invited because the other performers knew she had dance training. She began by performing in supporting roles before becoming more confident and graduating to lead and solo performances, as well as compeering the show after leaving her bartending duties. She appeared to earn the respect of female clients and was eventually propositioned by a number of them.

It was through Davey that the researcher met the rest of the performers at @D2, namely Hallam, Maddison and Rose. One other drag performer was present but did not wish to be interviewed for the study.

Hallam, Harry ('Holly Prick')
Sourcing: See entry for Davey.
Biography. Hallam was eighteen years old at the time of the fieldwork exercise. He is Caucasian. He had dressed in drag to celebrate his birthday at the club as a coming-of-age rite and had been requested to join the performers by Maddison, on the basis that he looked appropriate. He had been performing for three months at the time of the interview.

Rose, Tony ('Claudia Shirtlifter' / 'Claudia Shit-stabber')
Sourcing: See entry for Davey.
Biography: Rose was in his mid-twenties at the time of the fieldwork exercise. He was working at @D2 already when Maddison performed a drag segment and dared him to join in. He then participated on a regular, paid basis at the request of the venue's owner. Rose appeared to be from a middle-class background and worked in the information technology arena. While nervous of being interviewed (owing, according to Davey, to feeling 'uneducated'), Rose was thoughtful and provided interesting interview responses.

Maddison, Marcus ('CherAround' / 'Cher')
Sourcing: See entry for Davey.
Biography. Maddison was in his mid-thirties at the time of the fieldwork exercise. He trained at the Guildhall School of Drama and had worked as a dancer and performance artist. He began performing in drag as a result of working in a nightclub that demanded cabaret performances of its staff. Maddison is @D2's lead drag queen.

Rayne, Marcus ('Anna Glypta')
Sourcing: The researcher contacted Rayne after viewing hers internet page, which featured information on a number of famous (and infamous) drag queens, as well as indicating that she, too, was a performer. The researcher contacted her by telephone, explained the purpose of the thesis and the scope of her rights, should she choose to participate in the study.

Access was granted instantly, and copies of a letter detailing respondents' rights was duly received via post.

In order to prevent intrusion into the performer's hectic schedule, a series of interviews were conducted over the internet, each one prefaced with checks that Rayne consented to the interview being saved on to the computer and used for the purposes of the study. A face-to-face interview also took place during the ethnographic research after the performance. This initial distance was requested by the performer in order to prevent them being distracted from their work.

Biography: Rayne is in her late twenties. Hailing from Southampton, she first donned drag as an eighteen year old in order to participate in her public house employer's theme night. She then worked in a variety of jobs (from managing shops to working in pubs) before performing regularly in drag upon moving to Leeds, West Yorkshire. Performance is now her career and she spends a considerable amount of time supporting charities. She has been initiated to the third degree in the pagan, Wicca belief system. Female pronouns are used to describe Rayne in recognition of his ideal, transsexual identity, despite his male biology (as is explained in the text)

Venues Surveyed

The venues surveyed were chosen for their conformity to the required variables within the desired sample group. In each instance, the manager of the venue was contacted and informed of the purpose of the study and their permission sought before engaging in the fieldwork exercise. One venue declined to participate. Each venue was given a modified version of the respondent's rights information pack.

@D2 (workplace of respondents Davey, Maddison, Rose and Hallam)
A homosexual-owned public house and night club in Nottingham, England. The venue is mixed, in that it specifically welcomes both LGBTQ and heterosexual audiences. It presents low-key cabaret and a drag-queen DJ each night and ostentatious, musical, group performances on Bank Holidays.

Joshua Brooks' (venue for Potter's performance as 'Chloe Poems')
An entertainment venue catering for students in Manchester, England. It primarily hosts live music and discos but also hosts other events. It caters for a primarily heterosexual, educated audience.

The Birdcage (workplace of 'Miss Orry' and Ball)
A nightclub in Leeds (England) that is part of a chain of commercial venues that are owned by an entertainment agency. At the time of writing, while welcoming 'mixed' audiences, the club advertised for heterosexual audiences. It specialised in providing raucous entertainment for 'hen parties'.

The New Penny (workplace of Rayne)
A public house situated in Leeds city centre and said to be the longest-running, LGBTQ-orientated establishment in England outside of London. While heterosexuals are admitted, the venue's placement in the LGBTQ-frequented district of Leeds and its entertainment suggests that it caters for LGBTQ audiences rather than heterosexual ones.