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## Private I, Public Eye: Gender and Exposure

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## About

*Gender forum* is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

## Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to [gender-forum@uni-koeln.de](mailto:gender-forum@uni-koeln.de).

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

## Article Publishing

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## Editorial

1 The boundaries of the private and public self appear to have become less discernible within the last two decades. The expanding and ceaseless dissemination of personal pictures and narratives through different media have led to a vanishing sense of shielded privacy and intimacy. By the same token, the sense of continuously performing *oneself* because of seeing oneself as being seen increasingly shapes our perceptions and expectations of the gendered self. The notion of gender and sexual identity as a continued and staged performance renders the idea of an authentic and natural self ever more questionable. The three articles in this issue address the implications of altered relations of *Private I, Public Eye* for the general engagement with gender and sexual “identity” and its consequences for individual agency.

2 In “Cultural Bastards” Ralph Poole tackles questions of cultural and gender diversity played out on Vancouver’s Main Street, the “focal point of [...]multicultural hodgepodge, questioning the valence of spatial belonging” in Shani Mootoo’s short story “Out on Main Street”. The protagonist’s own felt incongruity with common gender and ethnic stereotypes has led to a fear of leaving the flat and being exposed to the public gaze, whereas, at home she can feel at ease with being a “butch”, lesbian, Indo-Caribbean immigrant in Canada. The subversive humour of the narrative, however, foregrounds the derisive aspects of this fear of going/being “out” which is based on a belief in the authenticity of stereotypes.

3 Tobias Schmidt’s exploration of the possibility of humour as a means of challenging stereotypical notions of gender and sexual identities centers on a very different topic. Tracing the stage act of the stand up comedian Eddie Izzard, “Being Cool About It” investigates the ways in which Izzard’s authority on stage promulgates and secures a “queer” stance on gender politics. Far from lamenting the *status quo* in his performances as a transvestite, the paper argues that “[t]here is no anger or bitterness in [Izzard’s] analysis of the society as it is today, but he rather presents a position of sovereignty and a strong belief in the generations to come.” The comedian’s transvestism as an integral part of his life as well as his act thus shows, how a private and public self can merge to challenge the heteronormative symmetry of sex, gender, and sexuality.

4 In contrast to this positive outlook on the subversive potential of public performances, the third contribution to this issue of gender forum draws a rather bleak portrait of contemporary celebrity culture. Dirk Schulz’s article ponders on the media’s regulating dissemination of private and public images of the famous. Drawing on Foucault’s study *Discipline and Punish* he argues that “while pop culture has always contributed to the public

negotiation of norms and values, the current manifestations of judge and jury through different media turn celebrities into detainees and their observation into panoptical affairs.” Thus, whereas the “authenticity” of the displayed performances of gender and sexual identity is increasingly questioned and its manufacturing more tangible, the failure to conform to or rather the failure to present the gender/sexual norm is publicly castigated and disciplined through the monitoring gaze of the media.

5 In addition *gender forum* is very happy to once again provide a platform for fictional writing. England-based author Anne Lauppe-Dunbar shares a chapter of her forthcoming novel called *Dark Mermaids* in which the story behind “the doping scam ‘Theme 14.25’ during the time of former German Democratic Republic [is] told through the voice of a former GDR Olympic swimmer.” Seeing how the drug-induced alteration of both physical appearance and mental experience shapes the protagonist’s sense of self, the narrative provides another interesting perspective on the interplay of the public distribution of gender norms and its effects on the individual.

# **Cultural Bastards: Caribbean-Canadian Humor in Shani Mootoo's *Out on Main Street***

By Ralph J. Poole, University of Salzburg, Austria

## **Abstract:**

Wife battering and murdering, prostitution and suicide have long been hushed incidences that nevertheless have finally been addressed by some Indo-Caribbean writers, one of which is the Canada-based artist and writer Shani Mootoo. In her novels *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *He Drown She in the Sea*, and *Valmiki's Daughter*, her poetry collection *The Predicament of Or*, and her short story collection *Out on Main Street*, Mootoo picks up the culturally specific ways of inscribing a culture of violence and shame onto Indo-Caribbean female sexual identities in ways that Mehta has described as being "associated with a series of taboos and restrictions imposed by male-ordered strategies of confinement and inhibition" (192). Even while living in Canada, Mootoo exemplifies Mehta's claim that Indo-Caribbean women find it difficult to free themselves – and the works they produce – from the haunting national and diasporic legacies of repression and invisibility. A reading of Mootoo's work as an example of the interlacing of sexuality and diasporic Caribbean identity reveals that a reconfiguration of "home" in terms of optional exile does not erase one's innate ethics, but actually magnifies them, since diasporic communities like the Indo-Caribbean tend to maintain their "cultural identity through migrating notions of gender-role conformity" (Mehta 209).

"Shut your arse up, before it have trouble between we in this street."  
(V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street*)

## **Silenced Female Sexuality in the Caribbean**

1 Canada may pride herself for being one of the most multicultural and multiethnic societies existing today. Her inhabitants are known to express individual predilections with a freedom and enthusiasm unknown elsewhere. What may easily be overlooked, however, is the fact that many of these people come from cultural backgrounds that do not allow for such a freedom of expression and thus find it not that simple to overcome deeply ingrained restrictions and internalized inhibitions. This is especially valid for the realm of sexuality. It seems that metropolises like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver are havens for sexually liberated life-styles, and yet this liberty does not apply to all people living in these places. Immigrants from Muslim or Catholic backgrounds with stricter traditional family values, for example, find it yet hard to adapt to such a way of living and thinking. And for different -- not necessarily religious -- reasons, Canadians of Caribbean descent often have difficulties throwing sets of habitual conventions overboard that still stem from their long history of colonization. Even today, strictly gendered norms of behavior make it especially for Caribbean women still difficult to choose on their own, where they want to live, what they want to work, and whom they want love.

2 What is even more surprising with the surge of gender and postcolonial studies in recent years is the acute lack of studies in sexuality on migrants of Caribbean descent. The reasons for this silence are multilayered, as might be expected. On the one hand, as Jenny Sharpe and Samantha Pinto point out, "[t]he study of sexuality in the Caribbean has historically been taboo, off-limits for scholarly research. Part of the forbidden nature of the subject has to do with a fear of reproducing the negative stereotyping of black hypersexuality that emerged from a history of slavery and colonialism" (247). On the other hand, "in the Caribbean a silence about the topic of sexuality also has to do with the Victorian attitudes that exist as a holdover from the region's colonial past" (247). These attitudes, largely due to British codes of sexual conduct, have prevented scholarship especially on female sexuality subsuming it within studies of kinship and family instead, while the topic of homosexuality has been ignored altogether as if such a "thing" did not even exist.

3 While slowly and very recently academics have approached the issues of Caribbean male sexuality in general and male homosexuality more specifically (see Chevannes, Reddock, Lewis, Murray, Padilla, La Fountain-Stokes), Caribbean women's sexuality still remains hardly interrogated. Interestingly, it is in the field of literary studies that female sexuality in the Caribbean has surfaced as scholarly topic.<sup>3</sup> The silence and the ensuing gap in information on female sexuality, and especially on lesbians and transsexuals, has according to Alison Donnell "created a no (wo)man's land" (214). The cause of this may be the fact that same-sex acts between women are criminalized in some territories (like Trinidad, Barbados, Antigua, and Dominica, although rarely enforced, see "ilga"), but more likely it is the general homophobia of the region that thwarts free expression of lesbian sexuality in both daily life and literature.

4 In her study on Indo-Caribbean women's sexuality, for example, Brinda Mehta addresses this silence head-on calling for a reconsideration of culturally sanctioned violence against women. Wife battering and murdering, prostitution and suicide have long been hushed incidences that nevertheless have finally been addressed by some Indo-Caribbean writers, one of which is the Canada-based artist and writer Shani Mootoo. In her novels *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *He Drown She in the Sea*, and *Valmiki's Daughter*, her poetry collection *The Predicament of Or*, and her short story collection *Out on Main Street* Mootoo picks up the culturally specific ways of inscribing a culture of violence and shame onto Indo-Caribbean female sexual identities in ways that Mehta has described as being "associated with a series of

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<sup>3</sup> For studies of Indo-Caribbean literature see Puri, Mehta, and Francis. A more anthropological approach, focusing on sex work and consumer culture in the Caribbean, offer Kempadoo, Brennan, Curtis. On Jamaican dancehall culture and its inherent (homo)sexual and misogynist politics see Cooper.

taboos and restrictions imposed by male-ordered strategies of confinement and inhibition" (192). Even while living in Canada, Mootoo exemplifies Mehta's claim that Indo-Caribbean women find it difficult to free themselves – and the works they produce – from the haunting national and diasporic legacies of repression and invisibility. A reading of Mootoo's work as an example of the interlacing of sexuality and diasporic Caribbean identity reveals that a reconfiguration of "home" in terms of optional exile does not erase one's innate ethics, but actually magnifies them, since diasporic communities like the Indo-Caribbean tend to maintain their "cultural identity through migrating notions of gender-role conformity" (Mehta 209).

5 What makes her special is that Shani Mootoo is amongst those writers from multicultural and multiethnic backgrounds, who not only speak of these backgrounds, but also answer for highly diversified outlooks on contemporary Canadian culture. Born in Ireland and raised in Trinidad, Mootoo at the age of nineteen has chosen Canada as her homestead. In her works she distinctly draws upon her own hybrid identity to examine gender and race issues both in the Caribbean and in Canada. In *Out on Main Street*, partially written in Indo-Caribbean patois, she addresses various culture clashes: East Indian versus Indo-Caribbean, British versus Caribbean, Caribbean versus American, Caribbean versus Canadian, American versus Canadian, men versus women, straight versus gay as well as butch versus femme. Vancouver's "Main Street" hereby symbolically functions as focal point of this multicultural hodgepodge, questioning the valence of spatial belonging: Whose "main street" is this anymore?

6 Whereas most of the stories are written in Standard English employing the mode of bleak melancholy and acerbic sarcasm, in the title story a doubly different style was chosen: it is a humorous story told in full-blown creole. This story's mode of humor transforms the darker atmosphere of the other stories into a lighter prospective view on identity politics. My claim is that by choosing this particular, ethnically grounded mode of humor, Mootoo puts herself into another category of cultural negotiations in two distinct ways. Since, as has been claimed by critics, Canadian humor stands apart from American and British humor in its tendency towards duality due to Canada's special colonial history, Mootoo accordingly picks up adhering techniques like juxtapositions, ambiguity, puns, and incongruity, all rooted in the traditional experience of Canadian humor. However, since here the humorous mode is based on the particular experience of a Caribbean-Canadian lesbian narrator, this story especially aims at transgression and subversion by choosing humor as textual vehicle. Thus, Mootoo not only takes up this comic colonial literary tradition, she also takes part in re-shaping its

transnational agenda in terms of gender and sexuality.

### **Lesbian *Flâneuring* and Cruising**

7 Shani Mootoo's collection of short stories, *Out on Main Street* (1993), is one of the very few texts by a Caribbean writer addressing lesbian sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Four of the nine stories depict lesbianism in one way or another with two of them being situated in Canada.<sup>5</sup> These stories stand out in their direct approach of lesbian desire and lifestyle, because, as Alison Donnell (in a footnote) in her study on twentieth-century Caribbean literature remarks, it is important to point out that

the more radical representations [of lesbian sexuality] have come from Indian-Caribbean writers and that this runs almost directly against the grain of cultural stereotyping through which we are not only encouraged to see Indian-Caribbean women as slower to come to writing, but also as more bound to traditional roles. (248)

The remainder of the stories depicts heterosexual relationships, mostly from the viewpoint of unsatisfied, discontent women who suffer in psychologically warping and sometimes even physically violent arrangements. All of these heterosexual relationships with selfish and hypocritical men seem unfulfilling for the female partner, and it is only within female-to-female relations that women find love. While I have to agree with Donnell that it is somewhat problematic to highlight the treasures of lesbian love "against this backdrop and its intimations of marital abuse, neglect and male violence" (217), I nevertheless find these other stories daring in their balancing the general values of women's emancipation and the culturally based hesitance of Caribbean women to gain access to these "women's rights."

8 The collection's title story "Out on Main Street" is a first-person narrative told by an unnamed Indo-Caribbean immigrant, who ruminates about her experience of going out on Vancouver's Main Street. While in the first part of the story she adds up a list of reasons for *not* going out, she then relates the events of what happens, when she does so after all. Her three main reasons for not going out are (firstly) her craving for sweets that "does give people like we a presupposition for untameable hip and thigh" (45), (secondly) her feeling of ethnic inferiority as a "watered-down Indian[]" (45) who doesn't even know the proper names to order the Indian "meethai and sweetrice," and as final reason, her girl-friend Janet is just too pretty to handle in public. Not only does Janet – all dressed- and made-up – look like "a

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<sup>4</sup> For yet another example of a Caribbean-Canadian writer engaging in lesbian representation within a transnational setting see Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Besides "Out on Main Street," the other story depicting lesbian sexuality is the concluding piece "The Upside-downness of the World as it Unfolds." Since this story is written in Standard English and I am interested in the humorous strategy of patois, I will not include a discussion of this otherwise highly interesting ethnic culture-class story between an Indo-Caribbean lesbian woman and a white Canadian lesbian couple.

walking-talking shampoo ad" that catches every man's eyes and makes every woman jealous. Above all, "[w]alking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant" makes the narrator "look like a gender day forget to classify" (48). But since she herself never learned to make the food she wants, her sweet tooth wins after all, and "parading in front de mirror practicing a jiggly-wiggly kind a walk" (48), she prepares herself for the difficult task of going out on Main Street.

9 The second and larger part of the story then takes place in a restaurant called "Kush Valley Sweets," owned by six Indian brothers. In short, stage-like episodes the constantly shifting atmosphere within this place accounts for the instable gender and race relations on Main Street in general. From the start, the narrator gets upset because as expected Janet draws all attention, leaving herself with only a femme masquerade, an imitation to "figgle and wiggle in mih best imitation a some a dem gay fellas dat I see downtown Vancouver, de ones who more femme dan even Janet" (50). She then goes through the humiliating process of ordering the sweets. Even her rehearsing the names beforehand cannot prevent the waiters to make fun of her false Indian origins, letting her feel like an "Indian-in-skin-colour-only," a "cultural bastard[]" (51).

10 The atmosphere changes once again, when two "big burly fellas" stumble in, making a fool of their drunken selves, but also patronizing the Indian waiters. While this temporarily brings all female customers to sympathize with the waiters, their taking advantage of this compassion by touching and chatting up some of these customers immediately turns against them in another "hairpin turn" (55). The final twist occurs when two butch lesbians enter the shop and heartily embrace the narrator and Janet. Having been slighted by the waiter just moments earlier, which led to a jealous outburst against Janet, the narrator now gets more attention than she asked for: "Well, all cover get blown. If it was even remotely possible dat I wasn't noticeable before, now Janet and I were over-exposed. We could a easily suffer from hypothermia, specially since it suddenly get cold cold in dere" (57).

11 What seems at first a special occasion, a one-time experience of going out on Main Street, in the end feels much more like a condensed version of every outing there. The story's ending, a rhetorical question addressed to an anonymous female reader "So tell me, what you think 'bout dis nah, girl?" (57), leads to the assumption that this is what is bound to happen every time when (somebody like) the narrator goes "Out on Main Street." Who is this unnamed narrator after all? There are three distinct layers of personality that I want to point out: she is an Indo-Caribbean living in Canada and at odds with her tri-cultural background; she is a butch lesbian at odds with her looks, demeanor, and appetite; and finally and

somewhat contradictorily, she is a very funny, very astute observer and chronicler of her environment and her precarious position within.

12 The title "Out on Main Street" is, of course, a double entendre, for not only does it mean going out in the sense of social mingling, but also coming out or being out in the sexual sense of leaving the closet of heterosexual masquerade. As much as this double meaning would apply to all the collection's stories in some way, it has a special meaning here in its directly intertwining the two meanings. As the narrator makes clear, "[g]oing for an outing" takes mental preparation as well as corporeal rehearsal. Parading in front of the mirror to practice the right kind of walk means here trying to cover her own identity by taking on that of another, but knowing of the futile effect this will have: "But if I ain't walking like a strong-man monkey I doh exactly feel right and I always revert back to mih true colours" (48). The narrator thus tries to hide in the closet wondering, "if I ain't mad enough" to go through this failing routine for the sake of the "little bacchanal" of getting some sweets (48). She is well aware of the male – openly homophobic – hostility and the female – more contained – embarrassment she is about to encounter, once she steps outside.

13 Disregarding the pun on "true colours" for the moment and thus leaving the additional complication of the narrator's ethnicity aside, her public appearance as a butch lesbian already means a double transgression. Roaming the streets of Vancouver the way she does makes her a *flâneur* of sorts. The figure of the *flâneur* is one of Modernity and is traditionally associated with male agents like Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. Nedra Reynolds points out that "Baudelaire identified the *flâneur* in 1859–60 as a new kind of public person. A wandering spectator, an observer watching but not participating in the scenes of modern urban life, the *flâneur* was mobile and detached. Dressed to be seen, both spectacle and spectator, the *flâneur* has become an emblem of the public sphere, a product of changes in the physical landscape and forms of movement those changes made possible" (71). The *flâneur* chose newly arisen urban places of consumption like boulevards, cafés and arcades to engage in his strolling and gazing. These places were certainly not private, but not completely public either. Therefore, they were ideal for the voyeuristic pleasure of *flânerie*, which in the case of Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* (or *Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940) could also take on a quasi-scientific quality. Mike Featherstone claims Benjamin's self-acclaimed "botanising on the asphalt" as reflecting the contradictions of urban modernity: "On the one hand, the *flâneur* is the idler or waster; on the other hand, he is the observer or detective, the suspicious person who is always looking, noting and classifying" (913).

14 In terms of gendered behavior, the *flâneur's* sexualized penetration of the urban sphere and his detached and ironically objectified gaze may be considered masculine, whereas his writings, his sketches and tableaux, being the focal point of his gaze, are traditionally gendered feminine.<sup>6</sup> But there have also been female *flâneurs* like George Sand, Renée Vivien, and Djuna Barnes, which leads to the question whether the traditional notion that the *flâneur* roaming the streets untouched applies for women as well. Obviously, no is the answer here, since, as Jane Rendell notes, "the figure of the public woman [...] represents the blurring of public and private boundaries, and the uncontrollable movement of women and female sexuality" (88). George Sand, for example, remained "untouched" as long as she was cross-dressed as a dandy, claiming "my clothes feared nothing [...]. No one knew me, no one looked at me, no one found fault with me [...]" (qtd. in Munt 116). This simulacrum of a *flâneur* may be, as Sally Munt argues, a "roving signifier" and as such "contribute to the unfixing of the supremacy of the heterosexual male gaze in urban spatial theory" (117). But one may also claim that woman can only be a *flâneur* as a transvestite and thus must rely on an "indeterminate sexuality, trapped in transliteration, caught in desire" (Munt 117).

15 The transgression of the female *flâneur* is her claim to spatial mobility. She may not be biologically male, but her gaze is considered to enact masculine visual privilege. Leaving her traditionally ascribed female-private space of domesticity to enter the male-public sphere turns the female *flâneur* into a figure of excess. This notion of woman as excess is even heightened when appropriated by the butch lesbian *flâneur*, because, as Munt points out, "[s]waggering down the street in her butch drag casting her roving eye left and right, the lesbian *flâneur* signifies a mobilised female sexuality *in control*, not out of control" (121). Breaking down clear distinctions between masculinity and femininity, the lesbian *flâneur* poses a threat to heteronormativity, "hence the jeering shout 'Is it a man or is it a woman?' is a cry of anxiety, as much as aggression" (Munt 121). On the one hand then, female *flâneuring* is a liberating accomplishment; on the other hand, it lacks the protection of the home and can thus turn into encountering a gendered urban war zone. Oscillating between empowerment and failure, the lesbian *flâneur* becomes vulnerable and susceptible to instable place designations.

16 The constantly shifting atmosphere on Main Street and in the café of Mootoo's story is a sign of how place is always temporal and intersubjective. The alliance with another female customer against the sexualized demeanor of the waiters ("our buddiness against de fresh

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Wilson reads the figure of the *flâneur* in a much more ambiguous light stressing his marginality and insecurity: "the *flâneur* effaces himself, becomes passive, feminine. In the writing of fragmentary pieces, he makes of himself a blank page upon which the city writes itself. It is a feminine, placatory gesture" (110).

brothers" [57]) turns against her, when the narrator greets the newly entered butch couple, and a differently defined alliance ensues:

Well, with Sandy and Lise is a dead giveaway dat dey not dressing fuh any man [...]. Soon as dey enter de room yuh could see de brothers and de couple men customers dat had come in minutes before stare dem down from head to Birkenstocks, dey eyes bulging with disgust. And de women in de room start shoo-shooing, and putting dey hand in front dey mouth to stop dey surprise, and false teeth, too, from falling out. (56)

Whereas the narrator at times has still tried to masquerade her butch identity, this couple does not care for any straight performance and thus consequently un-covers the narrator's disguise in turn, leaving her "over-exposed" and once more vulnerable for aggression and discrimination. It is this vulnerability that distinguishes her most from the traditional *flâneur*, who engages in his surroundings only to the point of untouchable voyeurism, his own sexual desire being camouflaged by his intellectualized attitude. It is the cruiser, a modified and in terms of sexual involvement truly radicalized version of the *flâneur*, who not only is "touchable," but who desirously reaches out and touches on his own. As Helge Mooshammer affirms, contrary to the *flâneur* who is always "in" the street, but in his distanced, gazing invisibility is never "of" the street, the cruiser genuinely gets involved. The sexual excitement that comes along with the visual pleasure of roaming the streets culminates in the eroticization of the place involved. As such, cruising is a performative act generating multifarious spaces of desires (Mooshammer 105).

17 While Mootoo's narrator is not necessarily a cruiser in the sense that she is out to get sex in public, she nevertheless enters a public domain that becomes increasingly sexualized by her transgressively visible lesbian desire and behavior. Thus, it is not only the entrance of the butch couple that puts the narrator center-stage; it is above all the touching of bodies that lets the instable equilibrium of this place slide completely. Whereas before, touching women clearly was ascribed to male-hetero behavior and chastised as such, clear dichotomies are now overturned with women touching each other:

Day leap over to us, eater to hug up and kiss like if dey hadn' seen us for years [...]. I figure dat de display was a genuine happiness to be seen wit us in dat place. While we stand up dere chatting, Sandy insist on rubbing she hand up and down Janet back -- wit friendly intent, mind you, and same time Lise have she arm round Sandy waist. Well, all cover get blown. (56-57)

This precarious sliding of habitualized notions of proper public conduct points toward what Paul Virilio in *Speed & Politics* has described as the policing of public order being persistently undermined by uncontrollable agency of the people passing through the city. Thus, an urban space is not simply the sum of its population, but the constantly changing

fabrication of desirously roaming people producing that city (3). As such, *flâneuring* and cruising engender a specific urban place with an excess of energy that renders the temporal and spacial arrangement of this place into a fluid entity. A café is not just a place to have tea and "sweetrice;" it may very well be the slippery floor of hazardous identity politics as Mootoo's story shows.

### **Canadian Humor Dressed in Caribbean Patois**

18 Mootoo's story does not only deal with the gendered discourse of the dichotomy of private versus public, intimate versus social, woman versus man, and gay versus straight, but also with the question of nationhood and citizenship. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his account on the tricky politics of recognition within a multicultural society speaks of "the impending breakup" (52) of Canada due to equal rights demands and to assertions of difference. While he plays out this scenario primarily as a conflict of English *versus* French Canada, the question of second-class citizenship also arises on very different planes within or alongside these larger political struggles for national identity. He nevertheless acknowledges that Canada is amongst those societies "becoming increasingly multicultural, while at the same time becoming more porous" (63). This porousness stemming from multinational migration leads to the awkward situation that there are "substantial numbers of people who are citizens and also belong to the culture that calls into question our philosophical boundaries. The challenge is to deal with their sense of marginalization without compromising our basic political principles" (Taylor 63). The crude sentence "this is how we do things here" often pops up in the still ongoing imposition of some cultures on others, "and with the assumed superiority that powers this imposition" (Taylor 63). Resistance to such hegemonic cultural politics may gain marginalized groups political visibility, but at the cost of losing some credibility as well as having to give up a superior ethical argument along the way. As Taylor astutely points out: "Very few Quebec independentists [...] can accept that what is mainly winning them their fight is a lack of recognition on the part of English Canada" (64).

19 Taylor rightly points out that a crucial field for negotiating notions of difference is education. The colonial situation has brought with it in our days a struggle to alter canons in order to include works of marginalized, formerly colonized cultures. In terms of liberal humanist education, moving away from reading works of mostly "dead white males" is done, however, not mainly with the goal to "enlighten" all students alike: "Enlarging and changing the curriculum is therefore essential not so much in the name of a broader culture for

everyone as in order to give due recognition to the hitherto excluded" (Taylor 65-66). But the inherent presumption of equal worth leads to yet another minefield of the politics of multiculturalism, since "[t]he peremptory demand for favorable judgments of worth is paradoxically – perhaps one should say tragically – homogenizing. For it implies that we already have the standards to make such judgments" (Taylor 71). Thus, including works of artists believed to be misrepresented for whatever reasons does not alter the fact of an underlying will to categorize. Taylor warns that "[b]y implicitly invoking our standards to judge all civilizations and cultures, the politics of difference can end up making everyone the same" (71).

20 Postcolonial writers like Shani Mootoo struggle with exactly a proposal like Taylor's to search for a "midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other" (72). A way to balance this is by employing a varied usage of language within their texts. In postcolonial linguistic theory this has been called code-switching or the application of what poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite has called "nation language." With its emphasis on orality, nation language "is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning" (17), but also facial gestures or hand movements, all of which are lost in written language, of course. Thus, to accommodate English within their own cultural experience, Caribbean writers have often resorted to this notion of nation language that is based on dialect or creole spoken in a specific Caribbean country. While for Brathwaite the word "dialect" "carries very pejorative overtones" (13) that includes aesthetic downgrading, it must be conceded that as a linguistic term "dialect" does not carry such overtones. Nevertheless, Brathwaite insists on nation language being "an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people" (13).

21 What Brathwaite here means as extensions of world Englishes in a broader linguistic sense are creoles or patois. Contrary to pidgins, creoles are more locally based. Whereas a pidgin is more of a contact language, because it "comes into play primarily in the interaction between people who do not share the practical knowledge of a more established language" (Talib 124), creole is the first language or mother tongue of a group of people and therefore more stable and with a richer vocabulary of its own than a pidgin. As Ismael Talib points out, there are several reasons for using dialects of English, political and aesthetic. For example Michelle Cliff, yet another lesbian Caribbean-Canadian writer, in her essays states that she

uses English to resist its hegemony, and she mixes it with patois to disrupt and to "stretch" English to her resistant purposes. For her, this act of rebellion against "fluent" English is like "spitting in their cultural soup" (60) because it mixes up "the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose" (59). Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter says of Cliff's strategy, that she "needs to unlearn the very hegemony of the King's English in order to approximate an 'authentic' vision of a precolonial, uncolonized, prior self" (901). As to aesthetic reasons for using creole, writers agree that it infuses a sense of realism into the work, be it, for example, to represent geographically specified urban speech or to indicate a lower level of literacy in other cases (Talib 140).

22 When we look back at Mootoo, only the title story of *Out on Main Street* is written in fully-fledged creole, whereas the other stories may or may not include elements of code-mixing or -switching to a certain extent, meaning the narrator or characters change from one language or dialect to another. Interestingly, two such linguistic shifts occur in the story "Out on Main Street" that point towards Mootoo's textual politics here. When the female Indian customer is felt up by one of the waiters, she complains in Standard English to the narrator:

"Whoever does he think he is! Calling me dear and touching me like that! Why do these men always think that they have permission to touch whatever and wherever they want! And you can't make a fuss about it in public, because it is exactly what those people out there want to hear about so that they can say how sexist and uncivilized our culture is." (55)

And the narrator agrees, switching back to dialect "Yeah. I know. Yuh right!" (55). The customer's utterance actually is one of the longest direct speech sequences in the story, which makes it doubly stand out in terms of style and content. On the one hand, this female alliance bridges the gap between otherwise differing sexual predilections imminent in the situation at stake. On the other hand, it refers to the precarious balancing of gender and ethnic concerns: should she take the side of the Indian men against white society or rather against her Indian brothers in favor of feminist politics? For the woman's statement occurs right after the incident in the café that includes the second instance of code-switching in the story.

23 When two drunken white men enter the Indian café, one of them addresses the waiter asking, "Are you Sikh?" The waiter, who had spoken in strict patois with the narrator before, now retorts in standard English: "No, I think I am fine, thank you. But I am sorry if I look sick, Sir" (52-53). Using standard English here rhetorically enhances the deliberate slight, because by doing so he succeeds in making fun of the stupidly stereotyping white man. Importing this phrase in standard English makes it even more obvious that not only the whole story is written in creole, but also that this is a world symbolically turned upside-down. It is

the white man here, who is the intruder in the otherwise homogeneous cultural space of the café. And with the waiter taking on the language of the white man, he shows his cultural ability in code-switching as well as his superior sense of the situation at hand. The two white men, so much at ease at first, quickly sense their defeat in this particular place, and withdraw to their own safe world outside.

24 As much as the narrator herself feels insecure in this semi-public place, as watcher and chronicler she nevertheless captures the moment of inverse power relations both in form through code-switching and in content through the application of humor, both of which could be said to be techniques borrowed from the "enemy." The narrative voice clearly revels in her ability to relate to her nameless friend all that has been going on while out on Main Street. This narrative technique not only links her to an oral culture traditionally located in her home Caribbean. Her application of the postcolonial humorous posture ironically also ties her into the Canadian tradition of dualistic wit. As Gerald Noonan in his study on the specificity of Canadian humor provocatively claims, "Canada has become the place where British tradition meets contemporary American culture. [...] The result for the Canadian is cultural schizophrenia" (912). Or put differently, as Marshall McLuhan once did, "Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity" (qtd. in Dabydeen 236). This cultural feeling paves the specific way for Canadian writers to relieve the tension of not wanting to fall on either side – be it British or American: they make fun of themselves.

25 Due to Canada's particular historical development and geographical location, it is the cultural self-perception of duality that accounts for a difference even in perceiving stereotypes. Noonan argues that not only is this "presence of the 'other,' linguistically, culturally, [...] a fact of life in virtually every section of the country" (913), is also the basis of the distinct type of Canadian humor: duality. Whereas the imperialist, non-dualistic cultures of Britain and the US excel in a non-dualist kind of humor, the Canadian humorists, as Noonan suggests, generate a balanced duality, a way of dissolving in laughter the patterns of opposites inherent in Canadian culture. While the British humorist resorts to the more literal and fact-oriented mode, the American humorist with his leaning towards the more hyperbolic tall tale tends to exaggerate. But since humor prospers in security – cultural, political, or other –, Canada's traditional lack of such security prevents it from indulging "either in blind self-aggrandizing jollities, or in ill-humored self-rendering satire" (Noonan 913). One may, of course, disagree with such seemingly crude cultural distinctions, but R. E. Watters in his study on the work of Stephen Leacock nevertheless has also reminded us that

Canadian humor is harder to detect than British or American humor, because it grounds on the balancing quality of weighing contending forces:

As a people bent on self-preservation, Canadians have had to forego two luxuries: that of forgetting themselves in gay abandon and that of losing their tempers in righteous wrath. Yet there is a kind of humor that combines full understanding of the contending forces with a wry recognition of one's ineffectiveness in controlling them – a humor in which one sees himself as others see him but without any admission that this outer man is a truer portrait than the inner – a humor based on the incongruity between the real and the ideal, in which the ideal is repeatedly thwarted by the real but never quite annihilated. Such humor is Canadian. (543)

Interestingly, a "disproportionate number" of Canadian comedy writers have moved to the forefront of US-American sit-com script-writers, which accounts for the assumption that "a duality of mind, not one-mindedness, [...] is the more useful attribute in the presentation of humour for a pluralistic audience" (Noonan 917). Already Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye had claimed in his *Anatomy of Criticism* that "the theme of the comic is the integration of society" and involves "a catharsis of the [...] comic emotions, which are sympathy and ridicule" (43). Shani Mootoo here is yet another example of how sympathy and ridicule come more easily the more one can masquerade as the "other." Whereas humor arguably has an "international language," it still relies on its own cultural distinctness, when transposed to the broad general. And whereas Canadian humor arguably grounds in duality, duality as an essential of universal comic language "will continue to require familiarity with the contours and mixed reality of the chosen homeground" (Noonan 918).

26 The extent of Mootoo's humorous story can only be grasped when realizing the homeground she has chosen to represent Canada's syncretistic reality. Clearly, this is a Canadian setting: it is Main Street in Vancouver. And clearly, these are Canadian characters accounting for the multicultural mixture of the nation's population. The humor stems from the failure to sustain the illusion of equality and "difference-blindness," another term Charles Taylor uses to describe a liberalism that purports to "offer a neutral ground on which people of all cultures can meet and coexist" (62). As much as the lesbian couple fails in trying to enact a straight performance, their effort in masking their Trinidadian identity in order to "pass" for "grade A Indians" (Mootoo 45) fails equally.

27 It is, however, the narrator's ability of laughing at herself, realizing the ridiculousness of her masquerades that links the awareness of her own multiple identifications with the structure of duality in Canadian humor. The narrator naively had assumed that to leave Trinidad and to migrate to Canada would enable her to "live without people shoo-shooing behind her back" (47). What she had not realized is that her newly acquired Canadian layer of

identity would bring to the forefront her already doubly layered identity as Indo-Caribbean. The Indian sweet shop on Vancouver's Main Street makes her acutely aware that she belongs nowhere. Not only is she being treated "like a gender dey forget to classify" (48), her tricontinental identity lets people treat her and Janet like "cultural bastards" (51). But as much as she craves "cultural authenticity" (Donnell 217) the way she craves sweets, she is bound to fail. Just like she knows the Indian delicacies by taste, but not by their proper name, she looks "forward to de day I find out dat place inside me where I am nothing else but Trinidadian" (52), albeit realizing by now that this day will never come.

28 With Vancouver's Main Street, Mootoo chooses Canada as a social setting that already is hyperbolic in its very lack of cultural authenticity. Making fun of herself in finding the true India only in Canada, in turn includes her again within this cultural hodgepodge and gives proof to the valence of Canadian humor as necessarily being multiculturally grounded:

I used to think I was Hindu *par excellence* until I come up here and see real flesh and blood Indian from India. Up here, I learning 'bout all kind a custom and food and music and clothes dat we never see or hear 'bout in good ole Trinidad. Is de next best thing to going to India, in truth, oui! But Indian store clerk on Main Street doh have no patience with us, specially when we talking English to dem. Yuh ask dem a question in English and dey insist on giving de answer in Hindi or Punjabi or Urdu or Gujarati. How I suppose to know de difference even! And den dey look at yuh disdainful disdainful – like yuh disloyal, like yuh is a traitor. (47-48)

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# “Being Cool About It”: Performing Gender with Eddie Izzard

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## Abstract:

Eddie Izzard in every single performance, just as Michel Foucault in his inaugural lecture, has got an obligation to begin. But, I would argue that within Izzard’s discourse predominantly structured according to the conventions of stand-up comedy, he is able to also incorporate other discourses that were started before that performance and that he actually takes part in from a subversive point of view. Izzard’s position within that discourse is a position of strength, as he – from a position of power as the person on stage – presents his interpretation which, according to him, is the way the world will look at things in the future anyway. There is no anger or bitterness in his analysis of the society as it is today, but he rather presents a position of sovereignty and a strong belief in the generations to come. When Foucault talks about other people’s “desire to find themselves, right from the outside, on the other side of discourse, without having to stand outside it” (1971: 7), the way Eddie Izzard deals with the topic of gender in his stand-up performance as a transvestite might give pointers for what Foucault is talking about.

1 Stand-up Comedy remains an under theorised part of performance culture. But there are certain aspects supporting an analysis of this form of entertainment using Foucauldian theories of power as “audiences and performers [are placed] in an unusual[ly] interactive dependency” (Fraiberg: 316). Fraiberg at the same time states the problem that stand-up is not clearly connected to a specific disciplinary focus. It is

too performance- or drama-oriented for the social sciences; it’s not dramatic enough for drama studies; it’s too popular and non-fictional for literary studies; and it’s evidently too mainstream for feminist studies. (318)

Michel Foucault mentions the “dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localised in them” (1998: 96). This image of the web could also be applied to the set up of an audience at a stand-up comedian’s performance, where the comedian and all of the members of the audience and their individual reactions to the show creating exactly such a “dense web”. As “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”, we see why all of these powers of resistance are not necessarily localised within that web, or network.

2 In *Orders of Discourse* Michel Foucault claims that other people, just like himself “harbour a similar desire to be freed from the obligation to begin, a similar desire to find themselves, right from the outside, on the other side of discourse, without having to stand outside it” (1971: 7). This is not just a rhetorical introduction to his inaugural lecture<sup>1</sup> on the

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault will return to this remark at the end of his lecture for a very intimate and conclusive depiction of his relation with his mentor Jean Hyppolite.

various forms of analyses of discourse(s), but also as an invitation to look for – and maybe even find – ways to accomplish the seemingly impossible task to possess a voice that is heard in a specific discourse and to find oneself inside and outside of discourse at the same time.

3 In *The History of Sexuality, Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault states that discourse “transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.” (100f.) Therefore, discourse and power are intrinsically connected.

Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. [...] Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society. (ibid.: 93)

4 For society as an assembly of people spending time together in a more or less ordered community it can be argued that people present in the audience of a stand-up performance bring about such a complex strategic situation showing itself, at times, in force relations. Applying the concept of “force relations”, Foucault explains how the distribution of that power comes about and why certain people and discourses have the ability to exercise a certain kind of power at a given moment in time. These force relations show themselves in “‘states of power’, [which] are always local and unstable” (ibid.).

5 Power can be exercised in different ways, either to promote and strengthen a specific way of looking at things, or to undermine and criticise a particular perspective. For Foucault, the exercise of power is always productive. Power is not to be understood as a static situation to be overcome in a single effort, in a sort of “revolutionary fight”. The struggle is not between two (or more) parties fighting for dominance on the battlefields of society. Rather, the concept of power as enacted in force fields necessarily calls for a constant negotiation within the given discourse. As he states in *The Will to Knowledge*: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1998: 95), a resistance which occurs and has to be articulated all over the place.

6 However, in specific contexts individuals are able to determine in how far a certain discourse evolves. Force relations also empower people in specific situations to be heard better than others. Crucially, this “exercise of power”, a factual sovereignty over the complex strategic situation, e.g. a specific routine performed by the stand-up comedian is never only a way of oppression in telling people what to think or what to be entertained by. Even if the audience or some of its members do not agree with the perspective of the comedian, the routine as an enactment of power can “at least” be productive in the sense of provoking a (friendly *or* hostile) reaction.

7 Foucault also addresses the topic of an individual's influence on the perception of their person. In his late writings on ethics, Foucault shows that individuals can influence the way they appear to others. As identity is not understood as a fixed essence, but rather as something that can and has to be constantly (re-)enacted, Foucault points to specific modes of representation he calls "technologies of the self". They can be seen as equivalent to Butler's concept of "expressions" in the context of the enactment of gender: "From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of 'expression'." (148)

8 What Butler calls "expressions" and what Foucault calls "technologies of the self" are "ways in which people put forward, and police, their 'selves' in society; and the ways in which available discourses may enable or discourage various practices of the self" (Gauntlett 136). They are used as the internal and external practice of our internal ethics, of our set of standards defining how we perceive ourselves as individuals and – maybe even more importantly – of how we are perceived by others. Even though these technologies were introduced with respect to personal behaviour in a specific social field, more often than not are these technologies used for the individual's own sake. For Gauntlett, this is "not necessarily done 'for show', to give an impression to an audience" (ibid.). In this paper, however, I will look at how such expressions or technologies of the self can in fact be enacted in a specific way in front of an audience on the stand-up stage.

9 The gender performance of Eddie Izzard as a transvestite is part of the way he presents himself (on and off stage) to other people. Although it remains to be seen if Izzard intends to put his wearing of "women's clothes" to comic use, the mere act of cross-dressing is generally interpreted as and associated with comedic elements. Butler observes that

[w]ithin feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities. But the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original' is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows. (135)

10 So, whether or not there is necessarily any comedic quality to cross-dressing or not, the accentuation of the underlying construction of gender as such always plays an important role. Not everyone shares this idea of separation of comedy from its subversive potential. Lidlahar, in the case of Jenny Eclair, argues that "if her performance establishes the stand-up routine as the appropriate place for the destabilisation of gender hierarchies, it may serve to preclude attempts to achieve a similar destabilisation in other arenas, such as the workplace, much as the 'disordered' behaviour of the carnival served to reinforce the 'ordered' behaviour

of the rest of the year.” (Conclusion) But I would argue with Butler that “those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ [...] in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.” (146f.) In order for “expressions” of gender to become part of the social and the symbolic culture, they rely on constantly repeated performances to generate a recognisable identity.

11 Butler also argues for the possibility of an invention and re-invention of that identity on the same grounds. In these various (re-)iterations “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). She advocates the subversive element pertaining to the exercise of that power. “As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism“ (146f.).

12 Everybody partakes in the Foucauldian force field of power, yet one is not necessarily (pre-)determined concerning one’s acts within this field. As soon as the discourse of culture and the symbolic is understood as a constant redistribution of power-relations, there is an inherent (political) option for agency within the system. Sometimes, when certain individuals successfully act out these options for agency, “gender trouble” becomes part of the overall discourse. In this sense, the performance of Eddie Izzard, as a transvestite, but not a drag act, can be regarded as a “*de facto* political gesture [to recast the symbolic]” (Emerling 117).

13 In his work *The Art of Comedy* Paul Ryan gives a “definition” of the act of stand-up comedy:

the comic has usually written out a script from which he or she works, with lists of jokes or anecdotes to tell. Some stand-ups don’t write out their entire routine, however, they have a very good idea of topics they plan to talk about onstage. They may improvise, banter with the audience (called *riffing*), or constantly look for new perceptions and opportunities to find hilarity. Stand-ups usually work alone, but there are some well-known pairs(XVI).

As for the way in which a stand-up comedian actually performs on stage, the positions differ to quite an extent. John Harrop likens stand-up comedians to musclemen or participants of a beauty-pageant as they are only “projecting themselves [...] they are not playing a character” (1992: 5). For David Marc, “the stand-up comedian addresses an audience as a naked self, eschewing the luxury of a clear-cut distinction between art and life” (11).

14 Former comedian Oliver Double on the other hand argues that there are “many aspects of stand-up which *do* involve characterization” (315), for example when stand-up comedians shift between different *stage personae* in order to bring a conversation between different protagonist to life on stage. He refers to this form of acting as “momentary characterisation” (ibid.). Not only does he thereby contradict (or at least modify) the two different positions

mentioned before on what a stand-up comedian actually does, he even makes this aspect a central feature of what he calls a “good description of acting in stand-up comedy” (321) or of that form of comedy as such: “characterizations linked with some form of commentary”. He notes that in stand-up, the addition of the “commentary” (ibid.) – which could be linked to Brecht’s concept of acting as an *imperfect* illusion – is absolutely necessary on the comedy stage, as the “feelings [of the comedian] must not at the bottom be those of the character, so that the audience’s [feelings] may not at the bottom be those of the character either” (ibid.). As comedy, in a very broad sense, was defined by Carol C. Burnett, as “tragedy -- plus time” (Burnett), we see that the aspect of distancing always plays a role for a situation to be perceived as comical.

15 Therefore, there seems to be a double movement in comedy which consists of, on the one hand, the “momentary characterisation” the comedian and the audience need in order to present (on the side of the comedian) or become interested in (on the side of the audience) a certain character, while the distancing part – here the “commentary” – makes it possible to create or at least emphasise the comic effect this kind of entertainment strives to create. This “commentary” is another instance of what Andrew Stott in the introduction to his book on comedy calls “a division of consciousness that enables the subject to see the world with bifurcated vision” (14). He concludes that there is a constant “subversive” element in all of comedy that does not “open up a path to ‘truth’, [but rather that] the duality enabled in joking and comic scenario opposes any univocal interpretation of the world” (ibid.), any essentialist position, one might say.

16 Eddie Izzard can be regarded a central figure for a combined analysis of the fields of stand-up and gender, not only because he frequently cross-dresses on and off stage. It seems important to point to the fact that Izzard refers to himself as a transvestite, not a drag queen. The concept of “drag” usually refers to people who wear clothes generally attributed to the “opposite sex” in public to create a specific *stage persona*.<sup>2</sup> Transvestites, on the other hand, do not necessarily appear on stage in their outfit, but cross-dressing is rather a part of their private self. Izzard claims that his choice in clothing is no integral part of his performance, as he stresses that “I cross-dressed in private, but I don't call it cross-dressing any more. Now, I'm just wearing clothes” (Deevoy). Even though Izzard understates this aspect of his life in an attempt to emphasise the normality of that aspect for his life it still remains a defining factor for my analysis of his act, and a topic he cannot completely ignore on stage.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of prominent typical drag queens are Miss Understood, Peaches Christ, Lypsinka, Dame Edna Everage, Chi Chi LaRue, Margo Howard-Howard, Betty "Legs" Diamond, The Lady Chablis, Verka Serduchka, Miss Coco Peru, Shequida, Rikki Reeves, Betty Butterfield and Divine.

Nevertheless, the main argument here – as the title of the paper suggests – is in line with this quote from Izzard’s bit called “Discrimination” from his show *Unrepeatable*: “ever since I came out as a T.V. [transvestite], if I’m relaxed about it, everyone else seems to go, ‘Yes, so what’s the problem?’” (1994) In this way, an individuals “coolness” about their situation influences the reaction of someone else.

17 This sort of “manipulation” might not be necessary, as Glick argues that

Izzard is known to be a transvestite performing for a presumably liberal audience in San Francisco. That is, he is performing for an audience that is likely to be familiar with critical ideas about colonialism and thus being comfortable viewing it as a ‘theft’ of sorts. (295)

Big parts of his act could be understood as “preaching to the choir” of people who are already on his side. But Izzard has, especially in the recent past, become more and more prominent outside the circle of people of his “peer group” due to film roles in *Ocean’s Twelve*, *Ocean’s Thirteen*, and *Valkyrie*, a lead role in the FX television series *The Riches*, and his participation in a well documented series of 43 marathons around England, Ireland, and Wales for Sports Relief. The public awareness of his person makes for a more diverse audience at his (transvestite) stand-up gigs these days.

18 For Eddie Izzard, being a transvestite is a part of his life, it does not necessarily force him to go on stage. But it does not prevent him from doing so either. According to Judith Butler, a performance in drag promotes

a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects. The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (146).

19 In his various programs Izzard sometimes refers to his clothing, but in those bits where he does not mention it specifically, it is of no further importance for his material. For example, when Izzard employs the most obvious elements of “momentary characterization”, he imitates a variety of different characters with different voicing. The most obvious changes in his voices are his impersonations of James Mason and Sean Connery. These two actors are generally linked to extreme stereotypes of masculinity – and also quite easily identifiable. If anything, Izzard’s clothes might be regarded as an extreme (comedic) contrast to the roles Mason and Connery are usually associated with, but this is – at least to my knowledge – never put to any comic use in the programs. He sometimes presents his material dressed “as a man” without changing his complete routine.

20 These two examples are taken from his adequately entitled program *Dress to Kill*:

Yes, I'm a professional transvestite so I can run about in heels and not fall over, 'cause, you know, if women fall over wearing heels, that's embarrassing; but if a bloke falls over wearing heels, then you have to kill yourself! It's the end of your life, it's quite difficult.

Also, if you're a transvestite, you get lumped into that weirdo grouping, you know? [...] I'm much more in the *executive* transvestite area. Travel the world, yes, it's much more executive. Like J. Edgar Hoover, what a fuckhead he was! They found out when he died that he was a transvestite, and they go, 'Well, that explains his weird behavior!' Yeah, fucking *weirdo* transvestite! (pointing to himself) *Executive* transvestite. It's a lot wider community, more wide than you'd think...

21 In his transvestism, Izzard does not pretend to do something that would go unnoticed by his audience. He takes part in that discourse and he does not go on stage without addressing the fact that he is a man in high heels. But we see already that he consciously works against the perception that his cross-dressing might make him “weird”. He rather says that there are actually weird people within the “community” of transvestites, just as in any other group defined by one feature or affiliation. So, one could argue that he is aware of the gendered position he impersonates on stage as he acknowledges his audience’s possible awareness and irritation. At the same time, he shows that other things could be far more irritating, which make transvestism irrelevant for the definition of somebody as “weird”. So, one could say that in relation to his outfit he uses strategies of normalisation in order to refer to something at first perceived as strange, which is then explained (away) or rather, put in a different context to show the actual insignificance of that aspect.

22 In *Circle*, a performance recorded live in New York City, he also refers to the heavy make-up he wears on stage, describing a potential conversation with members from the audience as part of his routine:

‘Shit he's wearing a lot of make-up.’ But, you know, that's a third millennium thing, and you've just got to swing with it. There's going to be a lot more guys with make-up during this millennium. By the end of the millennium you'll probably find that you're dead and... hopefully. Otherwise you'll be on your millionth face-lift and... fucking ratchet just like 'Brazil'. Yeah, so... and a lot more guys in make-up, probably. Cause make-up's just crazy anyway, you know, cause Native Americans used to wear it, and it did all right for them until... until well, until you killed them all, I suppose. In that kind of European bastard-like way.

23 Here, he follows a similar strategy. Firstly, that wearing make-up is crazy irrespective of who wears it. Secondly, that in a specific historical and local context familiar to his American audience the painting of one's face was not at all related to being a transvestite, yet still some sort of “stigma”. Thirdly, that the normalisation of men wearing make-up is only a matter of time – albeit a time period of one thousand years he refers to here – until nobody will take notice of this fact anymore.

24 Thus, by addressing this topic, Izzard does not pretend that nobody would notice his make-up. Rather, he decides to take part in the discourse of gender and stereotypes. But, by directly dismissing the significance of the aspect of wearing make-up as a man, he seems to be on the other side of that discourse already – or at least at *another* side, to which he would like to take his audience as well, although this would arguably mean for individual members of his audience to live (and maybe even evolve) for one thousand more years.

And I must admit, I got caught nicking stuff when I was 15, and I was nicking makeup, back in Boots in Bexhill-On-Sea. I could've bought it, I could've saved up and bought it, but I thought, if I bought it, someone might say, 'Hey, you're a boy buying makeup! You must be a transvestite!' And then I'd have to go, 'Oh, Sherlock Holmes! How did you get to the bottom of that one,' [...] so I didn't buy the makeup, I nicked it! And I had a loaf of brown bread, so I put it under this brown bread, and I run out of the shop and down Bexhill High Street, and they caught me! But I was 15, so they let me off with a warning, which was: 'This lipstick is not gonna work with this eye-shadow, no way! That's light blue, that's a death colour! You want a bit of foundation in this, that's very cheap foundation.' 'Oh...' 'That's a warning!' 'Oh, thank you, Chief Constable.' (1996)

25 Izzard in each performance has got an obligation to begin. But, I would argue that within Izzard's discourse predominantly structured according to the conventions of stand-up, he is able to also incorporate discourses started before that performance and that he actually takes part in from a subversive point of view, like Foucault. Looking at the power structures of what happens during his performance, and the discourse on gender-identities as something that is at times "thrown in the mix", (but visible in all other parts of the act as well) might be regarded as some sort of loophole to actually enter a discourse without necessarily "starting it". At the same time, Izzard's position within that discourse is a position of strength, as he – from a position of power as the person on stage – presents his interpretation which, as he says, is going to become the way the world is going to work in the future anyway. There does not seem to be a lot of anger or bitterness in his analysis of the society as it is today, but rather a position of sovereignty and a strong belief in the generations to come.

6 In "Jesus and Man" Izzard presents a conversation between God and Jesus in a classic father-son conversation. In this context, he presents parts of Jesus' behaviour on earth as a series of decisions not sufficiently thought through at the possible expense of the believability of the Christian faith "in the long run". After presenting some of the seemingly wrong decisions made by Jesus in a style generally referred to as "observational comedy", Izzard also pokes fun at the fact that these parts are a generally accepted part of Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This could be seen as a another example for force relations and an argument could be made along the lines of Foucault's conception of power within society, which cannot be elaborated on in this article.

‘You have got vampirism and cannibalism right at the beginning... Oh, Gee! And you died on Easter, the biggest pagan ceremony in the history of ever! (losing it a bit) You're going to celebrate the year of your death in a different year, each year! Depending on where the moon is, for God's sake! If they don't work out that's pagan I'll just eat my hat.’ ‘Dad, don't worry. No one's going to work it out for 2000 years - until a transvestite points it out in New York!’ (2002)

In “informing” his audience of these pagan qualities in Christendom, Izzard reduces himself to his appearance as a transvestite. In doing so, he plays with the general conception of people towards transvestism as a marginal subculture not generally linked to the uncovering of religious background information.

27 Nancy Walker refers to women’s humorous writing as a “subversive protest against” the perceived lack of power (10). Regina Barecca states that “comedy is a way [...] writers can reflect the absurdity of the dominant ideology while undermining the very basis of this discourse” (19). Fraiberg emphasises that this form, the comic form of subversion combines “being both within the dominant ideology, reflecting it, and yet still being able to undermine it through humorous signifying” (319).

28 Concerning Foucault’s statement about his and other people’s “desire to find themselves, right from the outside, on the other side of discourse, without having to stand outside it” (1971: 7), the way Eddie Izzard deals with the topic of gender in his subversive stand-up performance as a transvestite shows us how.

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# **The Fame to Please: The Normalisation of Celebrities**

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## **Abstract:**

A reiterated statement following Michael Jackson's cardiac arrest last year was that mega stardom, in western culture, had come to an end. Indeed, while fame and stardom apparently remain desirable currencies in our society, the paradigms which determine success and failure have visibly changed. On the one hand the proliferation of a public exposure of "ordinary people" has undermined the notion of exceptionality as being necessary for fame. On the other hand, while pop culture has always contributed to the public negotiation of norms and values, the current manifestations of judge and jury through different media turn celebrities into detainees and their monitoring into a panoptical affair. As public figures, who crave the spotlight, they nowadays have to accept the ongoing documentation of their doings, thereby ceaselessly supplying images for a mediarena, in which their on- and offstage conduct, especially in relation to sex, gender and sexuality is discussed and judged.

1 A reiterated statement following Michael Jackson's cardiac arrest last year was that mega stardom, in Western culture, had come to an end. Indeed, while fame and stardom apparently remain desirable currencies in our society, the paradigms which determine success and failure have visibly changed. On the one hand the proliferation of a public exposure of "ordinary people" has undermined the notion of exceptionality as being necessary for fame. On the other hand, while pop culture has always contributed to the public negotiation of norms and values, the current manifestations of judge and jury through different media turn celebrities into detainees and their monitoring into a panoptical affair. Taking into account that "[i]n modern societies people are increasingly watched, and their activities documented and classified with a view to creating populations that conform to social norms" (Inglis: 5) the different approach to celebrities may be regarded as a consequential outcome of a generally increasing surveillance culture. As public figures, who crave the spotlight, they nowadays have to accept the ongoing documentation of their doings, thereby ceaselessly supplying images for a "mediarena", in which their on- and offstage conduct, especially in relation to sex, gender and sexuality is discussed and judged.

2 In his study *A Short History of Celebrity* (2010) Fred Inglis posits that "the fairly new concept of celebrity may tell us plenty about what is to be cherished and built upon as well as what is to be despised and ought to be destroyed in the subsequent invention of modern society." (Inglis 3) Indeed, through the abidingly intermingled documentation of career moves and private affairs celebrities provide narratives of acquittal and repudiation, probation and conviction. The media's relentless gaze does not allow for "steps out of line" or lasting sentiments of privilege and grandeur. Consequently it has become a prerequisite for public

figures to present themselves as humble and “normal” instead of “unique” and “different” as had been the standard attributions to “stars” in former days. As Tyler Cowen likewise posits:

Modern fame removes the luster from societal role models. Today almost all individuals appear less meritorious, given the commercial incentives for intense media scrutiny. The more we see of our leaders and the more we know about them, the less exalted they appear, even if they are no worse than heroes from time past. (Cowen: 49-50)

These are the evident economic and technical reasons that seem to be responsible for the growing demystification and overwriting of superstardom in favour of a proliferating celebrity culture as an abiding media spectacle. But other reasons become discernible, reasons which are evocative of a turn in the contemporary cultural mindset.

3 The continued tabloid-, television-, and internet-exposure of celebrities has become a means of staging public negotiations of values and norms, bringing together increasingly fragmented and individualised societies. The contemporary celebrity panopticon creates “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images [...] It is not something *added* to the real world - not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society’s real unreality.” (Debord: 12-13) The apparent shift within Western culture from viewing stars as ideals into detainees within the panoptic view can be retributed to their function of providing available points of references in an altered structuring of sociality:

Celebrity is also one of the adhesives which, at a time when the realms of public politics, civil society, and private domestic life are increasingly fractured and enclosed in separate enclaves, serves to pull those separate entities together and to do its bit towards maintaining social cohesion and common values. (ibid. 4)

Rather than being glamorous events catering to escapist fantasies of the viewing public, discourses surrounding celebrities now subscribe to a regulating principle that does not allow for extravagancies, but demands the acceptance of and subjection to *common* laws. Instead of showing us the means and potentialities of breaking out of social conventions, of leaving the confinements of ordinary lives and common duties, they now lend themselves to public demonstrations of discipline and regulation. Their incessant surveillance, the ongoing scrutiny and public contemplation of their attempts at “transgression”, works to effect and condition appropriate behaviour/performances.

4 As Judith Butler notes, “[a]s that which relies on categories that render individuals socially interchangeable with one another, regulation is bound up with the process of normalization.” (55) This apparent “process of normalization” within celebrity culture has serious implications for its current staging of gender and sexuality. Celebrity culture’s increasing emphasis on exchangeability, discipline and malleability makes it much more

difficult and risky for the performer to challenge the public eye, whose interest in the famous has notably changed. The advent of casting shows by which most contemporary celebrities enter the media as well as of multiple formations of internet communities most prominently bring to the fore what Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) already observed as a growing pleasure in

the activity of judging. [...] Born along by the omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline, basing itself on all the carceral apparatuses, it has become one of the major functions of our society. The judges of normality are everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power. (304)

The celebrity-judge now evidently needs to be added to the list of the judges of normality, which means: everybody.

5 The popularity and easy accessibility of casting and "reality" shows and their continued staging of the candidates' required "sexiness" guarantees a widespread distribution of regulating ideas of how to perform one's gender and sexuality in order to please. As can be observed, even on shows that proclaim to search for musical or dramatic talent, the contestants' sex appeal becomes a major factor in the jury's comments and verdicts. This aspect of their performance is always something they need to "work on". While Paul Potts and Susan Boyle, two highly publicised and successful contestants of *Britain's Got Talent*, may be regarded as counter-examples the continued stress on their difference from the conventional casting/celebrity type has safely marked them as exceptions proving the rule. Moreover, their celebrated "otherness" is not due to daring performances or because they authoritatively appear to challenge the norm. Their "rags to riches" stories rather help to fend off complaints regarding the programmes' predictability and assist in maintaining the public interest in formula shows that always need new candidates and devoted viewers.<sup>1</sup>

6 What is noteworthy in the context of casting and reality shows is that the accompanying narratives and reviews exceed the duration of the shows, although many "careers" seem to end rather than take off with the finale of the show. Indeed, the main pleasure gained by witnessing such formula shows in particular and celebrity culture in

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<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Paul Potts has had his teeth capped and wears upmarket clothes. After the show's ending Susan Boyle needed to check into a clinic due to exhaustion and now likewise has had a complete "makeover". Thus both performers meanwhile line up with the status quo of celebrity instead of challenging it.

general seems to derive from a pleasure in the democratisation of judge and jury. As Ellis Cashmore in his study *Celebrity/Culture* discerns:

Celebs must surrender themselves to live in a kind of virtual Panopticon - the ideal prison where the cells are arranged around a central watchtower in which concealed authority figures can inspect without being inspected. We, the fans, are in the watchtower and the celebs are open to our inspection. The moment they withdraw or become reticent, we lose interest and start peering at others. Just as we vote wannabe celebs out of the Big Brother house, we can send celebs into oblivion. And we know it. (4)

Cashmore's delineation of celebrity culture as a panoptic endeavour already points out an evident change in the relationship and power distribution of celebrity and public. Another implication, however, needs to be taken into consideration. The public's apparently increased juridical power regarding the making and breaking of stars has not merely led to impatience with attempts at withdrawal and reticence from the objects under scrutiny. Indeed, within the virtual celebrity panopticon there *is no* means of escaping the relentless gaze as a possibility of self-defence.

7 The public's awareness of and vote in the untiring manufacturing and disposal of celebrities is one important and determining factor for and evidence of a cultural shift. But what may be even more significant is the extent, by which the public's attention and pleasure in judging is relocated from an appraisal of an individual's creative capacities and achievements to the media exposure and discussion of his or her shortcomings and downfalls. A public negotiation of a person's appropriate or delinquent behaviour accompanies every career and through television, tabloids and the internet *everyone* can participate. Sex, gender and sexuality become, or rather, remain the main benchmarks when it comes to judging the individual performer. And by means of a proliferating instalment of anonymous judging communities on the internet everyone may

take pleasure in judging presidents, leaders, and famous entertainers by especially harsh and oversimplified standards. In the realm of the stars prejudice is given free reign to rule opinion. Fans can let off critical steam, or express vicarious love, without fear of repercussions, and without having to confront the complexity of the moral issues involved. (Cowen: 6)

The apparent shift of power dissemination and its current display throughout the different media puts much more pressure on the individual celebrity. Inventing and staging a public persona on one's own terms becomes much more difficult, because the pictures and narratives which the performer aims to distribute and sell are continuously undercut by those, which the celebrity may rather not show. The pose, henceforth, has become much harder to strike, at least as a means to create an enduring image.

8 To discern this change of presentation a look at the icons of the late 1970s and early 80s is strikingly informative. It becomes apparent that gender bending surfaced not only as a playful engagement with gender norms within subcultures, but rather became a prerequisite for a performer's mass appeal. The attraction of the former "sex symbols" evidently rested on their excessive self-stylisations and a pleasure in a glamorized pose of ambiguity. The blatant and widespread pleasure in the pose echoed Oscar Wilde's conviction that "the first duty in life is to be as artificially as possible. What the second duty is, no one has yet discovered." The androgynous look of the former pop stars rendered their physicality and, due to a generally assumed correspondence between the sexed body and desire, their sexuality undecidable. Due to their use of heavy make up and colourful clothing their bodily attributes, their "flesh", was deflected and rendered less palpable. In the "good old" days of gender bending the performances of many celebrities challenged "an opposition between a style that one assumes and one's 'true' being" and rather foregrounded that "the mask *is* the face" (Sontag).

9 Whereas the music of the 80s has experienced a comeback in recent years, both in the original or in a slightly revamped shape, the looks and fashion statements of that time are primarily commented upon in derogatory terms. While fashion obviously always is a matter of debate and a temporal affair, the general bashing of the 80s investment in gender bending vestments evidently speaks of a more thorough change in our cultural climate regarding gender and sexuality. This change has been initiated by and carried out in "the increasingly strained relationship between stardom and celebrity and artifice and authenticity". (Holmes and Redmond: 5) Although casting shows foreground how gender can and needs to be enacted to be convincing *as* performance, thus undermining the notion of its authentic correspondence to "sex", they also function as mediated rites of passage. The participants are initiated into the means and meanings of girl- and boyhood. On the one hand they learn how to *do* gender and on the other that femininity and accordingly masculinity are quintessential features, but need to be discovered, examined and perfected. Consequently the body, the residence of both, performative potentialities and their limitations, has become *the* site of inspection and discipline. Increasingly

celebrities communicate through their flesh: the popular media produces a gaze that focuses on the shape, size, *look* of the body, and fans idolize and decry the famous on the basis of the perfect (and increasingly) imperfect bodies they display. (ibid.: 15)

The times of overall glambiguity seem to be over because, the pose now always demands to be ex-posed and because attempts at denaturalisation are seen as poses *only*, not as a "serious" means to question and challenge heteronormativity. As an evident backlash against two

decades of poststructuralist thinking and postmodern playfulness we are witnessing a discursive return to the (sexed) body as a natural if formable essence of a person. And in our relentless panoptic view on celebrities, they've become the public role models or warning examples regarding its proper presentation.

10 The unresolved paradox of artifice and authenticity had been embraced and put into creative practice by stars such as David Bowie, Annie Lennox, Boy George, and Madonna. Now it is met with rigorous attempts at its categorical separation through the panoptic conviction of "deceptive" appearances. There are the images and performances, which celebrities and PR-networks create for us to see and those they probably would like to hide from the public view. Thereby the official, artificial poses become regulated by the intimate and "real" images of celebrities, seemingly revealing to us the "true face behind the mask". By this means, the public's disbelief in the performers' "unnatural" stage persona is apparently granted and attestable by bringing the "true selves" of celebrities into focus. The popularity of celebrity exposure in all media speaks of a growing pleasure in seeing public figures in humiliating situations, bereft of the means to pose. But can the paradox of artifice and authenticity ultimately be solved by the regulating, panoptic view on stars? Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, in their introduction to the volume *Framing Celebrity* (2006), are similarly sceptical of the possibility to differentiate between the real and pretence:

One of the central paradoxes of the construction and consumption of stars and celebrities rests on the supposed "unmediated" nature of people's relationship with them, and the highly manufactured way they are brought into vision. A range of new media technologies and formats has made the dialogue between actuality and fakery much more charged. Famous people are now often captured in the raw, "up close and personal", yet they are also fabricated by the ever-expanding reach of PR networks and digital technologies which manipulate and distort the "real". (15)

What Holmes and Redmond seem to neglect is that it is not only a longing for unmediated intimacy, which the celebrity panopticon aims to satisfy, but a longing for poetic justice and "correction".

11 Another paradox of our culture here becomes apparent. Visibility is necessary to become recognised as a subject, but recognition also exposes the subject and makes it vulnerable to regulating forces. Visibility and self-exposure remain and may even become increasingly desirable currencies because to be seen confirms our existence and personhood. And still, in face of the overtly displayed cynicism and spite conferred upon them, celebrities evidently live lives validated by the look of others. They seem to experience a surplus of confirmation and recognition and in a "mediated space [...] constructed as special and significant [...] receive a form of symbolic capital." (ibid. 10) In a culture "marked by a great

deal of anxiety, doubt and confusion over who- and how to be in a world where identity is felt to be [...] more questionable” (ibid. 2), celebrities seem to experience the utmost acknowledgment of the existence as a meaningful subject. But on another note, this surplus of visibility comes at a price since it does not allow for “escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred.” (Butler: 3)

12 Instead, the modern celebrity panopticon can be regarded as the most visible “form of social power that produces the intelligible field of subjects, and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted. As a norm that appears independent of the practices that it governs, its ideality is the reinstated effect of those very practices.” (ibid. 48) Stars and celebrities have become more vulnerable due to their incessant exposure as the example of Michael Jackson clearly shows. His career and public admiration began to falter, once the raving reviews of his musical genius became overwritten with the ongoing narratives and verdicts on his private life, in which his “extraordinariness” was judged very differently in comparison to the one displayed in videos or live performances. Performers still can exaggerate, titillate and provoke on stage, but offstage performing ordinariness has become a prerequisite as Graeme Turner in his study *Ordinary People and the Media* (2010) similarly notes: “Performing ordinariness has become an end in itself, and thus a rich and (it seems) inexhaustible means of generating new content for familiar formats.” (221)

13 The recent presentation of celebrities as monitored objects rather than authoritative subjects, quickly “outvoted” and replaced if too fractious has led to very different skill requirements. Celebrities do not attempt to challenge but willingly provide the images, by which sex and gender norms become consolidated. In their public appearances they enact the norm instead of subverting it in glamorised ways. Their enactments shape our ideas of how femininity or masculinity become readable and recitable. Or, inversely, they show us how a body can be disciplined, shaped and manipulated to adequately enact gender norms. As Butler notes “[s]ex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read.” (2004: 91) Because of the intermingled documentation of public and “private” performances, gender within the realms of popular culture is not a political, if playful, enactment of possibilities anymore. In a culture of visual repletion, images of Madonna’s “crotch grabbing” or NBA player Dennis Rodman’s wedding in drag have lost the subversive vigour they once may have had. Instead the appropriate, heteronormative gender performance can and needs to be learned to become successful. Its desired enactment becomes “worked out”, incorporated

and disciplined before our eyes, to confirm rather than complicate or question the alleged rooted- and interrelatedness of sex, gender, and desire.

14 As can be noted, the artificiality of the pose, the excessiveness of and play with gender and sexual ambiguity of the 70s and 80s has been narrowed down if not given up, at least in mainstream culture. The “lesbian kiss” meanwhile may have become a token in many performances of female pop stars, but rather confirms the notion of female homosexuality as foreplay at most and tantalising spectacle at best, pleasing rather than challenging phallic supremacy. The rare occurrences of gender bending are met with disbelief or seen as evident signs of the performer’s homosexuality. Even in the cases of seeming exceptions to this rule within popular culture, such as Pink or Bill Kaulitz, the singer of *Tokio Hotel*, their heterosexuality is continuously put into question as if they were “betraying” the heteronormative formula of proper gender presentation. Indeed, despite an apparently more tolerant attitude towards public figures who admit their “homosexuality”, its distinction from “heterosexuality” must be regulated by such discourses to not put the assumed correspondence between sex, gender, and sexuality seriously into question. Thus, sexual ambiguity of celebrities or their efforts at evading the subject are met with the relentless scrutiny of their private life and a discursive incitement to confess. Uncertainty would pose a considerable threat to the

cultural imperative to produce, for purposes of ideological regulation, a putative difference [which would] otherwise count as the same if sexual identity were not now interpreted as an essence installed in the unstable space between sex and the newly articulated category of sexuality or sexual orientation. (Edelmann 10)

While in the 70s and 80s, questions, rumours and speculations regarding the respective performer’s sexuality could also ensue, ambiguity on the whole was publicly embraced and celebrated. It did not need to be countered or scrutinised. Confusion was presented as a possible means to escape from confining conceptions of sex, gender and sexuality, imag(e)ining different possible enactments of gender, independent of the individual’s “sex” or sexuality. Through the growing apparatus of media surveillance that constantly reminds us of the “artificiality” of such poses, however, the pleasure of the public in celebrity culture has notably shifted.

15 At a time of general disillusionment, scepticism and a proliferation of personal exposure on the internet, being caught up in disciplining and regulating processes oneself, our panoptic view on celebrities at least guarantees

the pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light. [...] The power that lets itself be invaded by the

pleasure it is pursuing. And opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalising, or resisting it.” (Foucault: 45)

The parameters of valuing celebrities and the narratives accompanying their on- or off-stage performances have changed. Thus I strongly disagree with Ruth Penfold-Mounce who, in her study *Celebrity Culture and Crime* (2009), maintains that “stars embody the independent individual *par excellence*, representing the societal-held understanding of success, freedom and accessibility, which [...] celebrity culture propagates.” (52) Stars, nowadays, are not merely judged according to their presentation of a “different”, “extraordinary” and “more liberated” way of living. because according to the multiplying media platforms, “everybody” has the potential to achieve fame. The real challenge which celebrities currently face is, whether they are able to cope with the pressure of a continuous public scrutiny of their overall conduct. The success story of the latest stars does not so much depend on “a triumph, but the review, the ‘parade’, an ostentatious form of the examination. In it the 'subjects' [are] presented as ‘objects’ to the observation of a power that [is] manifested only by its gaze.” (Foucault: 187-188) Thus, along with the growing diversification of media discourses and their easy accessibility, a very different formula for public recognition and its ensuing regulation has emerged and a different performance is expected.

16 The media is not an apparatus subservient to or simply divulging celebrity. On the contrary, we can observe “the media’s construction of the private identity: the personal, the ordinary and the everyday.” (Turner: 223) We witness the paradoxical process of performers being disciplined and humiliated by the, oftentimes self-proclaimed, judges of normalcy on the one hand, and the suggested promise of “a spectacular form of personal validation” (ibid.: 223) on the other. Thus, to become a respected and liberated subject, celebrities aim to win the vote of the viewer through conforming and pleasing presentations. Celebrities thus

must be subjected to a regulatory apparatus, as Foucault would have called it, in order to get to the point where something like an exercise in freedom becomes possible. One has to submit to labels and names, to incursions, to invasions; one has to be gauged against measures of normalcy; and one has to pass the test. (Butler: 91)

The individual’s share in her or his emergence as a “star” and the maintenance of this status not only has visibly decreased, but has become visibly produced and regulated. The growing and unremitting media surveillance, which accompanies celebrities from the beginning of their careers has twofold implications. The panoptical ceremony of discipline, the “ostentatious form of exam-ination” as Foucault terms it, implants, showcases and reiterates a story of success available through obedience and hard work. It also reminds all aspirants from the start that their power is confined and indebted to the goodwill of the public and the media

rather than their talent. Celebrities lend themselves to the discursive “production of the parameters of personhood, that is, making persons according to abstract norms that at once condition and exceed the lives they make- and break.” (Butler: 56) And they are also constantly reminded of their exchangeability rather than their exceptionality.

17 Along with an overall expanding sexualisation disseminated throughout the different media, our culture insists on sexual expressions and confessions and becomes ever more impatient with a refusal to be definable and manageable accordingly. The proper modes of expressions and confessions not only can but need to be learned and, in regard of celebrity culture, “in a sense, the implicit regulation of gender takes place through the explicit regulation of sexuality.” (ibid.: 49) Foucault’s tracing of our culture’s attitude towards sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* evidently remains unmitigated, namely that

[i]t is through sex - in fact, an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality - that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility (seeing that it is both the hidden aspect and the generative principle of meaning), to the whole of his body (since it is a real and threatened part of it, while symbolically constituting the whole), to his identity (since it joins the force of a drive to the singularity of a history). (1978: 155-156)

With regard to celebrity culture this model works in a slightly altered way, but for the same purposes. While stars are produced before our eyes, they by the same token function as “a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself.” (Durgnat: 137-138) The self-presentations of many contemporary celebrities indeed feed on the demand for sexual explicitness and seem to celebrate the merits of “sexual liberation”. It remains difficult, however, to draw the lines between liberated expressions of (female) sexuality and the continued objectification of performers as sexual objects within the current mediarena.

18 For the most part, celebrity culture not only leaves a reiterated relation between sex, gender and sexuality untroubled but rather assists to naturalise this triad in confining, heteronormative ways. It is evident that the body as spectacle and scrutinised object continues to be the foremost measure by which female agency in particular is judged. To combine ordinary- with sexiness currently has become the most propagated image by which celebrity for women may be achieved and maintained. Indeed many performances of contemporary female stars profit from and expand on a successful formula of (self) stagings, which Richard Dyer already discerns in his article on “Four Films of Lana Turner” in 1977:

The sexy-ordinary configuration has become “glamour” [...]. Glamour and ordinariness are antithetical notions. The ordinary and the everyday are by definition not glamorous. Yet glamour [...] is based on manufacture, and can be seen to be the process, the industrial process, by which the ordinary is rendered glamorous. The glamour industry [...] sold itself

on the idea that, given its products, anyone- any woman anyway- could become beautiful. (92)

Moreover, the glamorised enactment of seemingly antithetical notions meanwhile adds another combination to the winning formula, namely the “virginal” and the “sexual”,. Britney Spears most prominently brought this successful recipe to the fore and has been imitated by many other contemporary young female performers.

19 It seems that nobody expects them to *actually* fulfil this image in “real life”. Rather, the documentation of their private inadequacies affirms its unlivability. However, their presentations serve to underwrite that the ever-pleasing sexy-virginal- ordinary configuration is what women *should present* and thus clearly continues to inform and condition our notion of “ideal” femininity. It seems as if the panoptic focus on popular culture regarding the sexual conduct and performance of its representatives is a discursive effort to appease the general paradox and enigma of sex and gender. What the discourses on celebrities teach us is that, time and again, it is alright to fail in one’s attempt at approximating the governing norms of gender and sexuality. But, by the same token, it is essential to attempt this approximation again and again.

20 On the one hand sex still is thought to be and, in its mediated omnipresence, reproduced as *the* locality of a person’s essential truth and reason, but on the other hand sex remains

an object of great suspicion; the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct and our existence, in spite of ourselves; the point of weakness where evil portents reach through to us; the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us: a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends. (Foucault, 1978: 69)

The panoptic view on celebrities measures their performance on stage with their private affairs, exploiting their sexual conduct as the site of hidden secrets and ultimate truths. It is the most visible effort at governing, disciplining and regulating sexual potentialities that otherwise would govern and determine our conduct uncontrollably and thus pose a threat to the established order. With the promise of seeing all attempts at transgression documented, punished and corrected, the pleasure and interest of the viewing public in judging is continuously satisfied while the celebrities likewise are warned not to overstep the negotiated boundaries of appropriate behaviour.

21 To conclude, the pop panopticon nowadays serves as the regulating apparatus, by which a heteronormative conception of sex, gender and sexual difference becomes widely distributed and stabilised. The monitoring and relentless gaze of the public, whose pleasure in

watching and judging grants no room for individual moments of flight, rather demands obedience to the governing principles of appropriate conduct. Madonna, the former icon of subversive gender play once *was* able to address sexuality as a fundamental cultural issue, while simultaneously challenging restrictive notions on its “gendered” enactments. Along with other pop stars of the 1970s and 1980s she drew attention to the endless potentialities of a self whose performances can never express an essential truth. The new generation of female pop icons *still* foregrounds sexuality as a matter of performance, but rather in order to indicate how to perform the sexed body in order to please, to conform and confirm rather than to question the reiterated and naturalised indicators of sexual and gender difference.

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## *Dark Mermaids*

By Anne Lauppe-Dunbar

### Chapter One

Berlin 1990

Pulling on her leather coat, Sophia headed out the door towards trouble. On the corner of Jobenstrasse, a man played the violin, raw fingers edging out of dirty gloves, pressing down on each string as the cadence was lost in the fog and icy air. She paused wondering at his dexterity, the cold making the rise and fall of Strauss (or was it Lehár?) sound muted, the notes shivering with cold, hitting the air, falling, not dispersing, as they should. Sophia dropped small change into the violin case and kept her head down, winding through the gathering crowd, itching with the need to be touched. As she moved through the night, she allowed her emotions to loosen from tightly reined to unbridled. Felt her fingertips prickle with the desire to stroke soft skin.

She crossed the road and headed for the U-Bahn. Near the church two drunks were arguing, hands stabbing into the air, jagged and thin as paper, their words made little sense. One waved his half-empty bottle as the other one swore, turned, and opened his flies to piss weakly against the window of a darkened shop.

Inside the train, the carriages filled with groups of young people on their way to catch the night's magic before dawn broke. A few, already drunk, lurched from one compartment to another, fisting bottle and cans, they growled out old German songs about the forests and mountains. Sophia stared at the station signs and distant winding streets. The night sky hung fog-mantled over the city, and as they left the Hauptbahnhof, crossing the old border where the Wall just recently stood, the group roared, toasting one another with mouthfuls of supermarket Schnapps and an old woman, sitting near the doors, shifted further into the corner. The woman opened her bag to peer at something white with silky fur, and what *looked* like an inquisitive pink nose. One red faced Schnapps drinker coughed, prodded his mate, pointed to the animal, then deliberately spat on the floor. Sophia tensed, but with a squeal of brakes, the tram juddered to a halt at Friedrichstrasse. The woman zipped her bag shut, glared at the group (who began the bloody song again) and carefully placed her feet out onto the platform. Sophia followed, noting with a slight smile the woman's whispered "*Idioten,*" to the rabbit in the bag.

The pavements were so full she had to step into the street to avoid the crowds that swarmed this way and that, chatting as they picked up *Bratwurst*, *Sauerkraut*, and *Glühwein* from the forest of market stalls had sprung up during the last month, even though it was only November. No one wanted to be sensible, to stay at home and watch the news. No, they wanted to see history in the making and talk about their neighbour's new freedom. Sophia noticed the market traders had responded in their usual way by hiking up their prices to make a killing out of the flood of eager visitors that poured in from East Germany. The visitors stared at the shop names, statues and window displays as if they'd stepped through the door into a fantastical theme park.

Tonight, the crowds were welcome. Moving between them, Sophia kept her eyes firmly on the pavement, although every now and then, she checked the edge of the throng for green uniforms that could spell danger.

A large man trailing a small child collided with her and apologised profusely, his '*Entschuldigung*' pronounced with a throaty hum. Sophia couldn't place the accent, but remembered the sound like a faint echo of an earlier time. This worried her, made her sidestep down the next alley, pausing to catch breath and pull her hair back, wrapping the blue-black scarf tightly round her face. Near Rosmarinstrasse, she stopped and listened, stretching her neck to the sky, the distant boom of music was unmistakable and hot anticipation blushed across her stomach and down her legs as she shivered, then smiled. Yes. She could be anything she wanted, because no one knew. She'd left no trace; apart from coded notes hidden in the kitchen drawer, under the sharp knives – every address, the directions, times, and occasionally even names, carefully written. And of course, tonight's entry was an empty space, so even better, she could come back.

Across the narrow alley way, Sophia saw the entrance. A bouncer was leaning against the doorpost watching her. He had dragons tattooed up both arms. She frowned, looked closer: dragons and wolves. The man signalled that it was ok for her to enter, but Sophia paused. This guy could be a problem: the ones with tattoos usually were. They remembered things, things she'd rather they forgot – like her face. But her fingers ached and burned with the longing to touch someone. No, she couldn't go back, not now.

Head down, she dug out the entry fee. She was getting older, or staff were getting younger. Whichever. She wished the pair who were collecting tickets would stop wriggling long enough to take her money. They surfed closer. Bobbing up and down like a pair of young seals. One of them grabbed her hand; stamping it with a florescent star, then as if he'd done something spectacular his partner gave him a high five before the pair bounced along to

the next punter. Around the corner, she squeezed past a couple pushed up against the wall. Both were moaning, swapping saliva *and* skin, then finally she made her way into the inky-black hall; signalling for a beer to avoid shouting through the purple music.

A swarm of bodies vibrated on the dance floor. Some in perfect rhythm, others touching: hand on shoulder, mouth to ear, leaning close to shout a word or two, weaving one way then the other. Watching them she felt anticipation build as the music swelled, filling her mind, the beat strong enough to pulse through bone. Her blood hummed, heart thumping thick and slow as she drank in the thunderous sound.

She checked the edge of the crowd for dealers: noting the moment when one figure joined another, how they drifted to the fringe, by the doorway, just far enough from the bright lights. The briefest of touches was accompanied by a nod, then hand moving to mouth, oh so casually slipping the discreet pill between lips, as the buyer swallowed his choice of drug with water or beer. Sometimes the buyer would slip away to rooms that offered pocket mirrors, a glass table where powder could be chopped into lines and inhaled through notes rolled up into straws, but Sophia wasn't interested in white powder. Finding a clean surface here would be pretty much impossible, and in any case, the chemical burn inside her nose (so near the brain) was off-putting: especially the numbing bite that slid into deep passing nausea. But the hit was like magic: a buzzing, talking, fizzy-tingle that had walls bulging, the wind whispering crazy secrets to a moon that swung heavy and metallic in the sky.

No. tonight she'd buy the white dots that warmed her icy blood enough to dance and (more importantly) feel. Ecstasy. She nodded once as they glanced over towards her, ecstasy was a good name.

The dealers were remarkably similar: whippet-thin, pale skin, lank hair, and shark-like eyes. Some sported tastelessly expensive watches and knives. Knives that glinted at the very edge of her sightline, swiftly removed to become little more than a slight of the hand, one easily denied; a reminder that these men believed themselves invincible.

Sophia felt her bones grind with the need to loosen. She glided nearer the edge of the room, imagining her skin flake and peel to reveal new watery scales: wet and ready. She swapped money for one powdery circular fragment, bought a glass of cold vodka and, placing the pill on her tongue, drank it back and ordered another beer. Now the delicious wait, not long before the drug would turn the air milky and thick as a creamy orgasm, music blasting through loosening bone under her hot wet skin.

She watched. Drinking in the wild night with more vodka and beer until the floor became a sticky pool of sliding limbs, the night at its shuddering darkest. Then she danced,

weaving her mind to the sound, moving like silk on water. Now finally she could see everything and nothing. There were no more boxed-in limitations. No more what she could, and what she could *not*, just one long pounding wave of silver-green dancers, joining, moving closer.

From the edge of the seething crowd a slim-hipped stranger separated, his shadow thickening moment by moment until he became something defined and beautiful. A cruel mouth that smiled, blue eyes, hooded yet bold, these things parting him from the shoal and sweat – the thrum of elastic movement. As they danced, Sophia wondered how he would taste and licked the downy fur on the back of his neck, slicked with sweat, then bit down gently. He gasped, held on to her wrists, sliding close, melting, pushing up hard against her. It was always so easy – this glide from loose to electric, nothing more than movement and sensation, the unrecorded break to exit from the crowd, walk, take a car (this time a taxi), then rapture and the effortless beat of skin on skin.

Later, deep in sleep, she dreamed of thick water above and below, muscles that strained; pushing forward to watch white light ripple and snake across the pale blue and white tiles lining the bottom of the pool. As she raised her eyes above the levelled water, dark hair waxing back, she saw the edge and moaned: the noise inside her head like a pack of swarming wasps. Sour-sweet chlorine splashed underfoot as row after row of children paraded to clapping hands.

Then she was swimming as if life depended on speeding through the white water, concentrating, moving, hitting the pool wall to shoot under-and-through in a practised arch. She bit down hard against the need for breath – and glimpsed, just for a moment, barely an inch of time, the wavering figures that leaned over the pool edge, their skin and eyes boiling, fusing together as she gasped and swam deeper. Here it was silent apart from the distorted clicking in her ears and the distant splash of other swimmers. But now the water curdled, stringy – thick with fear, and she realised with a low pulse of dread: she couldn't breathe, couldn't see through the reddening weave. A wet thickness bumped, drifted past her shoulder, slid through her hand then drifted away. There was a white object in the distance, coming closer: a delicate thing, such a soft motion, riding through water it drifted then bumped– a child's limb, alabaster against the sticky redness.

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Sophia woke moaning – she panicked and sat upright, pinpricks of white light darting

from left to right making her feel sick and dizzy. She'd bitten her lip, the blood tasted like copper and charcoal. Gagging, she slipped from the bed and fumbled her way into a strange bathroom. In the dark, she trickled water (not so much as to make a noise) into the sink and spat, using her hands to cup then rinse out the sour taste.

Her jaw, head, and shoulders were so tense they ached and burned. Still dizzy she tiptoed back into the bedroom, dreading the possibility she may have woken him, but the man was deep asleep. Sophia breathed, thanked god for small mercies, then gingerly fingered her way around the silent room. Slowly her mind filtered in the detail. The smell of washed curtains, the slimmest crack of light sneaking between the fabric to rest on a smart black desk and chair, and – oh thank god, there were her clothes, strewn across a second chair by the window.

As she tried to find her knickers, fumbling around at the bottom of the bed, she remembered how smooth his skin felt. He'd been young, very young, too young – talking about banks: his lifeblood based on numbers and money. At her age she should know better, worse still, she wasn't at all sure she'd liked him; a violent unsurprising lover who drove his body into hers with an intense silent, almost furious, focus. She'd drifted in a white-pill dream, imagined herself floating between icebergs, black as the moon, dead as the soft-limbed child of her dreams.

She pulled on her coat, glancing over to the bed with a ready excuse should he wake (people to see, things to do, *anything*) then crept to the door, carefully releasing the latch. Outside in the empty, dimly lit corridor Sophia leaned against the wall, mouth once again filled with blood, she limped the few steps across to the lift. No. Not the lift. That small box-like room, hanging from nothing but wire that could tighten and snap. She paused, walked quickly to the end of the corridor, pushing open the fire-exit and taking the stairs. There were three floors to go before she was out in the open. She spat into the gutter, retching out the horror of another bad dream. But now she could smell the bitter car fumes, almost taste the scent of fresh rain that drifted through the safe half-light of dawn.

Coughing, Sophia straightened to look for a taxicab; and hailed the one turning the corner into the street. The taxi slowed and paused, the driver not sure; checking to see if she was fit for his newly cleaned cab. She threw back her shoulders and strode towards him; head high, a different person in a new skin.

Once home she paused and listened before opening the main door, but there was nothing, only the low hum of traffic from across the other side of the park mixing with the slow pale air of a Sunday morning: allowing her time. She stumbled up the stairs to the top

floor; unlocked the apartment, then double locked it from inside. Her clothes were disgusting, gluey with sweat, smoke, and worse – the milky-sweet smell of sex. She dumped them on the floor and shivered along to the bathroom, peering in the mirror and twisting to turn on the shower – opening her mouth wide to stare at a blistering row of tooth marks along the right side. Her tongue bumped across the ridges.

“Bloody hell” she muttered and rinsed carefully, brushing her teeth, watching as her grey-blue eyes accused her of another monumental cock up that ended with purple circles under her eyes and bruised lips, making her feel (and look dear God) like a vampire: a creature who lived inside shadow. The shadow she worked hard not to see.

Thank goodness, there was only one small bruise on her neck, nothing more. Minimal damage. Then, crouching low over the toilet, she realised there *was* something worse – it hurt to pee.

Sophia stepped into the shower, closed her eyes and turned her face to the hot water. Water that cleansed and calmed. She washed her hair, smelling the comforting normality of eucalyptus shampoo and wished she could feel safe. Lately her dreams had been filled with distorted images of milky faces that bulged and melted before she could see who they were, or what they wanted. Sometimes death, heavy with reason, bent down to her as she struggled to wake.

Oh no, her thighs were bruised on the inside. Sophia pressed against the yellowing flesh and winced. Enough. She’d throw away all her flimsy dance clothes and the address book, right *now*, or at least the moment she was dry. But the thought had been there many times, and now as before, it vaporised in the steam.

In the kitchen she made strong coffee, adding hot milk and lots of sugar, then drank the toffee’d mixture like it was nectar, watching dawn break over a November Berlin. No point thinking about anything, not the dreams, not the man, not even the things she refused to name – the waxy images of skin and bone. If she didn’t want to remember, she couldn’t risk sleeping and inviting her night demons back. So that left painting. She dragged the paint stand to the window, finding the light by angling it to face outward. Squeezed out green and blue oil paint as the canvas yawned, at one moment a blank screen, cold and forbidding, the next an invitation for her to dive in and paint the beautiful ocean.

Sophia layered blue then green, making the ocean roll and sway. There was no need for her to pause and wait for the rocks and caves to tell secrets; she knew every eddy and rush of the tide, each stone that ground to sand, even the small anemone that grew in the glinting rock pool. Now she painted the greyness of a distant whale, sliding the brush across the

canvass to outline the orange and white of a clown fish darting to safety inside the greening seaweed. Time crept from early morning to a rain-soaked afternoon, and finally, she stopped, dipped brushes in white spirit, and sighed. The weather mirrored her mood, rain falling all day; and anyway, she hadn't the energy to go for her daily run.

Her mouth was healing faster than her mind, and she rinsed again with mouthwash, heated some leftover vegetable soup, and drank a cup of thick sweet hot chocolate, a leftover of childhood comforts, and finally, when she believed she might sleep, Sophia limped to bed, leaving the light shining in the sitting room. Wrapped tight, eyes closed; she prayed *please, just let me sleep.*

Monday dawn arrived, fuzzy-edged and bad-tempered, covering the city with a fog so thick that buildings slid in and out of focus. Sophia opened her eyes moments before the alarm began its annoying ring. She turned it to off and lay dozing in the warmth of the cosy bed, listening to the rain tap against her bedroom window. Wonderful. She'd actually slept well; felt energised and alive: something that always happened *after*. No, best not to think about that, but even as she pushed the images away, they formed and took shape. Six months ago, was that all? She thought it might even be less. There had been a week of intense loneliness: which grew to a month. The world seeming so distant – as though it existed beyond a wall of glue, or melted wax, keeping her isolated and separate. People spoke although she didn't really hear when they asked

“Sophia, are you all right”? Because she wasn't. Under her feet, the summer earth was cracking, her body slowly falling towards a darkness that would suck blood from bone. Sophia screwed up her eyes and shoved her face in the pillow. Her reaction had been desperate and typical. She'd found a new darkened hall and danced. The music fluid as honey, high on speed, daring the night shadows to catch her, never stopping until the boy's skin slid into hers. Afterwards sleep had claimed her, keeping her until late in the morning. The problem was that he'd been a boy – really no more than a *child*. He woke her, offered her a drink – his sweet young voice eager and obviously proud to supply his latest (please not *first*) conquest with coffee. She'd managed to pretend to drink as he chattered about what they could do with *their* Sunday. She didn't talk, just attempted a nod, and he (thank god) didn't expect a reply. When he went to shower, she scrambled, sweating with panic, to haul on any clothes she could find. Grabbing keys, coat, and money to dash out the front door and arrive home shaking. But this time it didn't end. He *phoned* that afternoon, concerned even a little angry, the message (she never answered the phone if the caller was unknown) stating he wanted. No, that was wrong. He *expected* to see her again – for an explanation at the very

least.

Sophia thumped her hand against the cushion – it should have been her head. This was not how a police officer behaved, but the sneaky little bastard had got under her skin and scared her. She pushed the bedclothes to one side. She'd called her Hajo on his *home* number, something she'd never done, would never ever do – if she hadn't been so stupid and panicked. And then she'd lied, told her boss (of all people) that she was getting harassment calls, when really it was just some stupid kid. She'd stuttered like a complete idiot that she was frightened the caller might hurt her. But the harm was all her own doing. Hajo told her to shut up, calm down, find a paper bag, and breathe into it. Then he hung up, leaving it to the operator to ring later saying that her number would be changed the next day.

Sophia got out of bed and peered suspiciously at her thighs, the bruises had faded but her mouth still hurt. That Monday morning Hajo had been completely normal. Brusque, rude and impatient, growling orders and insults at anyone who dared to query their caseload, his complete lack of concern had been immensely comforting.

Her bedroom was quiet, the rush of early morning traffic barely registering. The side lamp threw a gentle light across the bed and white rug. In her chest of drawers, all contents were precisely organised. The top drawer to the right held white bras folded in quiet contemplation next to white pants and brown socks. The left drawer was filled with her other underwear. Satin and chiffon, Basque with ruched lace, ribbons and ties, delicate black suspenders; stuff that just wouldn't fold – her secret life in black and purple.

In the closet, yellow shirts hung next to brown trousers, keeping company with the solitary spare police jacket. Once her dance clothes were washed they would hang alone in a dark corner of the closet, or she'd buy a replacement. Sophia didn't like to remember how many times the gossamer t-shirt and sheer leggings had ended up in the bin on the absolute promise she'd never go again. On the floor lay paint clothing, folded of course. Her running clothes lived in the bottom drawer or in the washer-dryer in the basement.

Sophia walked to the kitchen and filled the percolator (a *great* buy last month) with ground coffee. Heading for the bathroom, she tripped over the small pile of filthy clothing from the night before. How could she have left it there, festering and smelling, growing *bacteria*? Pulling on plastic gloves, she cleaned up, dumping the clothing into a tightly sealed bag, then showered fast, towelling hair, dragging a brush, then comb through until each strand was pulled into a neat, very tight, bun. She never wore make-up: wanting to be whatever she was, although quite often she wasn't at all sure *what*.

A pale face stared out from the mirror. Blue-grey eyes holding her with their fierce

gaze: those eyes were nothing like her. Two skins, she decided, pulling on the uniform daffodil shirt, two skins that rubbed (or chafed) occasionally moving as one when she was running, or frightened or *that*. Well, the darkness and dancing were gone, washed away with a good night's sleep, and now all the detail was safely recorded in the small book in the kitchen drawer - *and there it would bloody well stay*.

Her doorbell rang, demandingly shrill and she moved to the apartment door, unlocked it and leaned reluctantly out over the railing. Here we go. *Every* morning. There stood Frau Weiner on guard while the postman shoved letters into each separate tray. Frau Weiner would make *sure* nothing went into the wrong box, then she'd consider it her moral duty to ring everyone's doorbell.

"A letter for you, Frau Künstler – hand-written" she called as Sophia lifted a hand in a half wave before retreating and slamming the door. *Bloody letters*. Already there were three of the damn things making up a small pile that sat unread on the kitchen table. Her address – 14 Tiergartenstrasse – written in a slanted messy hand, a hand she was absolutely not going to remember. Sophia drank her coffee, thick and sweet as condensed milk, waking up quickly as the early grey light blinked over the city, casting a near silver-glow on The Victory Column in Tiergarten Park. She glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall. Hell. It was already past six-thirty, and if she wasn't out the door by quarter to seven she'd be late.

Shrugging on the green jacket, Sophia hugged the fabric tight, loving the safety of the uniform: *one of many*, not alone. The beige trousers were not flattering; lumpy and thick, they hid her slim figure well, as did her hat – the insignia of Police Protection Squad looked the same as it had for her twelve-year service.

As she did every morning, she touched her medals that hung by the door. They clinked, a hollow sound against the wall – useless trinkets from a lifetime ago. Grabbing the bag of washing, she ran downstairs, unlocked the mailbox, shoving the latest envelope violently to the back. Look at it later? Probably not.

In the basement, she threw the bag on top of her lonely washing machine; then turned and unlocked the door through to the garage. Sometimes she ran to work. Loving the feel of hard concrete under her feet she watched the world blinked itself awake: but not today, she was already late, so she'd take the car. There was a broken bike, mattress, and chair along with three plastic bags in the furthest corner, stinking of piss. This time the note she stuck on the resident's board wouldn't be so damn polite. Typical that no one had even noticed. The rubbish would have been there all weekend, and with it came drunks and homeless.

"Lazy bastards," she grunted, unlocking the car door, wincing as the ignition whined and

caught, spewing blue smoke out into the enclosed space. Keeping the windows shut she drove out onto the street.

It began raining heavily as she pulled out onto Kantstrasse, and Sophia made her way toward the Orangerie Pavilion, turning left into Charlottenburg police headquarters. What used to be the front garden of a grand house was now a muddy over-full car park. She reversed out and turned, driving furiously down towards Mollwitzstrasse, managing to *squeeze* into a narrow space opposite the bakery. *Saltzbrötchen*? Yum, the thought of them made her mouth water. *Saltzbrötchen* versus getting to work on time? She jogged across to the bakery. What the hell – she bought two, categorically, and *officially*, late again.

Monday briefing had started as she slipped behind her desk, ignoring Hajo's glare, picking up her mail and briefly noticing the large envelope with her name written in large capital letters across the front. More people writing to her when they could just leave her alone. Knut scowled across at her looking as fed up as a two-years-before-retirement man could. He'd practised complaining for decades and now had the art honed to perfection. Last week it had been the bloody East Germans swarming into the city; taking away resources he considered stretched to breaking point. Then (she'd had to hide a laugh), to cap it all he'd been asked to take on an East German police officer for *training*. Sophia liked to do extra work. Better to stay busy, focussed on the job, keeping well away from the dark pull of music and young strangers. So she volunteered for overtime during weekends and holidays, but to have to train an Ossi officer?

She listened with half an ear, trying to eat her salted roll under the desk like a school girl. The crumbs went everywhere. Then she sat up as Hajo outlined their week's work. He'd listed Grüner as her partner for desk duty. Ernst Grüner was an arsehole. In true form he grinned at her, lifted his middle finger, wiggling it in an exaggerated fashion while the others stood up, scraping their chairs back, glad to be out, glad to be going. The day couldn't get any worse. Sophia kicked the table leg and caught Hajo's eye. She smiled straight at him, showing her teeth, her face bright and angry, and was startled when he grinned back. He looked vibrant and amused, his face creasing, grey eyes flecked with silver – seeing everything. Abruptly he straightened, coughed, then dumped a pile of paperwork in front of her.

“Parking fines and tax,” he said.

Immature? Yes, without a doubt, but as Sophia worked through the pile of fines and receipts, she thought of a hundred ways to kill Ernst. She imagined using him as a speed bump, reversing to make *quite* sure, leaving him in a very small dark place, pushing him hard into the path of a speeding car, or just shooting him. The police station felt as if the walls

were closing in. Phones were ringing in time with the heavy tread of boots on the floor. Doors opened then slammed – and here she was having to typing out last month’s summons for *parking* fines and taxes. Neck sore, head beginning to throb she tried (inconspicuously) to stretch to the right, then left. Ernst eye’s lit up, his mouth opened and Sophia deliberately turned her back, vowing in the future to hand out fines only when she absolutely had to. She pulled the envelope from under the pile of still-to-be-processed mail and sighed. The handwriting was exactly the same as on the post at home. Unwanted mail. She prodded it, thought about throwing the thing in the bin, then bent the envelope in half, but it was too thick to fit in her pocket so she shoved it back to the bottom of the pile, she’d deal with it later.

Hajo was in his office ranting down the phone. She felt a flutter of sympathy for the victim, then remembered how his eyes had warmed when he grinned. Something had flared up between them. Unsettling. Weird. The bastard had deliberately made her angry. She wasn’t at school anymore and didn’t need to be ordered to sit at a stupid bloody desk as a warning not to be late again. Her best work was outside; either in the squad car or on foot and her typing was embarrassingly slow; something that gave Ernst intense pleasure. On top of that he was nearly at the end of his list. So any moment now the little shit would turn around and ask her why she was not at the end of hers?

## List of Contributors

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**Tobias Schmidt** is a Ph.D. candidate in American and English Studies at the University of Cologne. His master's thesis dealt with the Deleuzian conception of knowledge as a topology of and on specific planes. Currently, he is working in the field of television and media studies with a project focusing on different aspects of violence in American Sitcoms.

**Dirk Schulz** is a postdoctoral researcher at the English Department of the University of Cologne. He has a Master's degree in English/American Studies, Philosophy, and German Studies (2000) and completed his Ph.D. with a dissertation entitled *Setting the Record Queer. The Question of Performativity in The Picture of Dorian Gray, Mrs. Dalloway, and their Recent Rewritings* in 2008. He teaches courses in anglophone literature and culture as well as critical theory and recent publications deal with popular culture, semiotics and gender theory.

**Anne Lauppe-Dunbar** was born in South Africa to parents who had escaped Germany during World War II and were subsequently faced with living in the apartheid system. Returning briefly to Germany then Scotland and eventually England, Anne developed a strong relationship with her German relatives; along with a lifelong passion to write about the former German Democratic Republic.

In 2003 Anne was awarded a bursary at Swansea University, to study for an MA in Creative and Media writing, earning a distinction. Currently she is lecturing in Creative Writing at Swansea University and completing her Creative Writing PhD. Her novel and thesis *Dark*

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