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Performing Femininity:

Rae Bourbon and Christine Jorgensen Onstage

Gender is a normalizing force that dominates human interactions. Kessler and McKenna open their work on gender with the statement “as we go about our daily lives, we assume that every human being is either a male or a female.”¹ This assumption leads us to classify every person encountered as fitting neatly into one of these two genders and from there we make a whole series of assumptions about that person’s physical anatomy, tastes, preferences, and desires. One transsexual whom Kessler and McKenna interviewed asserts that “gender is an anchor” around which all other facts of the body are contextualized.² Similarly Daniel Jones, a performer who takes the stage under the cross gender name and persona of Jomama Jones, said that he felt “people want to fit you in a box” and that they will become uncomfortable if they are unable to successfully do it.³ Drag performers and transsexuals exist on the margins of the two gender binary. By existing on these margins these performers use both their physical bodies and humor to lampoon and subvert the gender binary and broaden the understanding of how gender is performed. Two performers, Rae Bourbon, a female impersonator, and Christine Jorgensen, a

¹ Kessler, Suzanne J, and Wendy McKenna *Gender: an ethnomethodological approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 1

² Ibid, 6

³ Jones, Daniel. Personal Interview. 8 Dec. 2010

transsexual who became a performer, placed their marginalized bodies on the stage and by doing so they heighten the subversion and critique of gender inherent in their performances.

Rae Bourbon was a highly trained professional performer. He appeared on Broadway opposite Mae West and honed his skills playing male and female roles on stage before becoming a female impersonator and touring the country with his nightclub act. Christine Jorgensen took a far different path to the stage. Born George Jorgensen Jr. she was briefly in the Army, held a job at a local library, and studied photography before becoming the first widely known male to female sex change recipient in 1952.⁴ Upon her return to the United States she was an instant celebrity. Hoping to capitalize on this fame she put together a show which flopped in LA before her agent suggested that perhaps her style would be more fit for the nightclub circuit, which she joined and achieved success. While Rae Bourbon was a female impersonator and Jorgensen was not, femininity became a performance for both of them on the stage. Bourbon consciously exaggerated and performed femininity on the stage as a vehicle for his humor and Jorgensen performed her gender the same way she would on the street. Both of the acts become drag shows in effect, since one of the main attractions of both performers was the chance to see a man perform as a woman on the stage or in the case of Jorgensen a man who had become a woman perform on stage as a woman. Both acts also rely on camp, a system of humor which is based in incongruity and theatricality.

In American popular culture there is often humor surrounding a man dressing as a woman. *Some Like It Hot*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *Tootsie*, serve as three modern examples of this phenomenon. All three were major motion pictures with commercial success whose plots were dependent on men who dress and act as women. These movies are both about drag performance and are examples of drag performance. This is because male actors playing these parts are

⁴ "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty" Daily News, New York, Dec. 2, 1952

themselves getting in to drag on the set of the movie and performing femininity for the camera while their characters are doing the same thing within the context of the plot. In these movies men dress as woman either to gain financial success (*Tootsie*), escape murderous gangsters (*Some Like it Hot*) or get closer to an estranged daughter (*Mrs. Doubtfire*). While Jack Lemmon's character in *Some Like it Hot* develops a relationship with another man all three of these movies feature heterosexual men dressing as women who maintain their personal masculinity. This masculinity is exemplified by their sexual desire for the women in whose midst they themselves are passing as women. In the movies the men who have been feminized use their position to gain information about women whom they desire and try to capitalize on this information out of drag.

These movies provide us with one context for viewing drag performance, which is humorous, light hearted, and masculine. This type of drag fits well within the heteronormative two gender binary. While both the actors and the characters they play get into drag in their performances, they do not use drag to challenge or critique gender norms. Their drag performances are safe and masculine. This type of drag performance is in stark contrast to the lives and performances of more traditional performers like Bourbon. The characters in the film do not challenge or subvert gender at all through their performances and heterosexuality and heteronormativity are affirmed by these films. In two of the films the guy gets the girl in the end which could not be farther from the nature of the drag performances of Bourbon and other more traditional female impersonators.

Drag performance is a queer performance, and by its nature dangerous. As Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, "Bodily margins are sites specifically invested with power and

danger.”⁵ Bourbon and Jorgensen have turned their bodies into marginalized sites through surgery and drag. On the stage the two exist on the fringes of what is considered acceptable within a heteronormative society. While it would seem that both challenge the bodily norms, neither outright ignores or destroys these norms. Bourbon does not dress as a woman on the street, for example, he dresses as a woman as part of a performance. Jorgensen recounts that she would not walk about in public in women’s clothing until after the operation had been performed.⁶ Yet, neither of these bodies fits well in a heteronormative space. Jorgensen’s failure to hit it big in the Orpheum theater in Los Angeles may have been partly due to her lack of experience performing, but also because audiences at the Orpheum theater were used to seeing the Marx Brothers, and Judy Garland, not a transexual female who struggled to hit notes or maintain a banter with the audience. The queer body/performer on the stage at the Orpheum is a marginalized body on a main stage, a location that presents a far greater danger to the rules as is than does a body in a nightclub or cabaret. In the case of these two performers, heterosexuality and heteronormativity were not only not enforced but subverted through opposite gender performance. Bourbon openly referenced homosexual acts and expressed his own homosexual desire in his performance and Jorgensen, after her operation, pursued relationships with men, placing these two performers out of the heteronormative construct, making their bodies sites of danger.

Like the movie representations of drag we saw earlier, the performances of Bourbon were certainly humorous. When Bourbon feminized himself for performance however, it was not a light hearted affair. A female impersonator is a performer of the male sex who adopts female dress and gender in performance, and while the craft may seem to be frivolous, getting in to

⁵ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble* (New York, Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990) 132

⁶ Docter, Richard F. *Becoming a Woman: A Biography of Christine Jorgensen* (New York: Haworth Press, 2008) 106

character is serious business for these performers. In the three previously mentioned movies, all the characters who adopt drag seem to just fall in to it. They do not spend hours honing their craft and compiling wardrobes, they simply throw something on and begin acting like women. The world of the actual female impersonator could not be more different. “It’s an elaborate process,” getting in to drag, “that takes a lot of creativity and practice,” write Rupp and Taylor in their work *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret*.⁷ Getting in to drag for a performance requires a large amount of skill and knowledge. Rupp and Taylor describe the process in detail, from multiple pairs of pantyhose to the creation of false breasts, getting ready for a drag performance is a process that has many steps and requires an attention to detail.⁸ The finished result is a performer with male anatomy who appears to be a highly stylized woman on the stage.

The line between a “drag queen” and an “female impersonator” is vague and according to some does not exist at all. Rupp and Taylor make the distinction that, “female impersonators keep the illusion of being women” throughout their stage performances whereas drag queens will play with the audience’s awareness that the performer is a man portraying a woman.⁹ While interviewing a female impersonator for *Mother Camp*, Esther Newton received the response that the term female impersonator simply “sounds more professional” than drag queen.¹⁰ If one were to use Rupp and Taylor’s distinction then Bourbon, and most performers, would cross the line between these two styles often within one performance. Newton as well as Rupp and Taylor described the content of drag shows by the performers with whom they researched, and in all the cases the performers would switch between the two styles during one show. Sometimes performers would sing and dance as women while at other times they might hint, or even

⁷ Rupp, Leila J and Verta Taylor *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003) 23

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21

⁹ *Ibid.*, 32

¹⁰ Newton, Esther *Mother Camp* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1972) 17

explicitly state, their biological sex. Bourbon is no different from any of these other performers. His eleven recordings exemplify this style switching. On all but one of these recordings he appears dressed as a woman on both the front and back covers, he uses the title “Miss” and will sometimes describe himself as a “woman” or “girl.” Within the performances, however, he will reference his “falsies” (fake breasts), or being a man, and maintain his femininity as natural throughout another. The fluidity with which Bourbon crosses serves to exemplify drag performance as drag is a performance in contradictions, the most obvious being between the body on the stage and the clothing that it is in and between the character of the woman being played and the times when the performer will break the fourth wall and refer to his ‘true’ nature.

In contrast to Bourbon, Christine Jorgensen was not technically a female impersonator or a drag queen, but a transexual who became a performer. Her show shares similarities with Bourbon’s performance style and the performances of female impersonators. Also Jorgensen’s show found its greatest success in the nightclub or cabaret style venue, the same type of venues that would give stage time to drag queen acts. While Bourbon would play the woman on stage, he would wear men’s clothing when not performing, a standard which is maintained by drag queens and female impersonators. On stage they play women, off stage they are men. Jorgensen’s case is different. Both on and off stage Jorgensen was a woman in dress and gender performance. Jorgensen never made reference to either being or having been a man while on stage. In one of her most popular numbers from her performance, Jorgensen sings “I enjoy *being* a girl”¹¹ (emphasis added) while in a routine that Bourbon performed on a multiple records titled “Madam” he sings “I just *want to be* one of the girls.”¹² Bourbon did claim in 1964 to have received a sex change of his own in Juarez, Mexico, which would have been the first operation

¹¹ Jorgensen, Christine “I Enjoy Being a Girl” *I Enjoy Being a Girl! (Live Cabaret Recording)* AEI Records 2006

¹² Bourbon, Ray. “Madam” *Miss Rae Bourbon, the New Woman* UTC Records 1956

of its kind performed in North America. The operation was most likely a hoax intended to get Bourbon's show more attention. The story of the operation ran in *Variety* magazine and the *Journal American*, both of which report that Bourbon had changed his sex from male to female.¹³ The difference between the two lyrics we see here highlights the anatomical difference between Bourbon and Jorgensen, and it also serves to point out and establish a few other differences as well.

Bourbon's show was a much raunchier performance, as most drag usually is. His jokes were intended for a mature audience and were often sexual in nature. This is consistent with the performance summaries that Rupp, Taylor, and Newton report in their works on drag. Jorgensen's performances were a much more family friendly performance and hers would not mention sexual acts explicitly, and only the most innocent of double entendres ever came from on the stage.

Despite this difference the shows that the two performers put on shared a multitude of similarities. Both performed in intimate nightclub settings. Jorgensen had hoped to perform on Broadway or in movies, but found success in nightclubs after the flop of her first performances in Los Angeles. Jorgensen received a high salary for her work, sometimes up to \$8,000 a week for performing.¹⁴ Bourbon traveled the country working the nightclub circuit as is seen by a list over close to sixty venues he had played on the back of his recording *Hollywood Expose*. Less than ten years after his death, Esther Newton reported that the average drag queen or female impersonator was making \$100 a week or less, Bourbon was likely making more, but even at the high end of the spectrum performers rarely made over \$1,000 a week.¹⁵ A key similarity between

¹³ "Ray-Rae Bourbon's Switch in Sex Allegiance; He's Now a She- a Mexican Standoff" *Variety* May 23, 1956
"Female Impersonator Needn't Fake it Again--Says Surgery Made Him a Her" *Journal American* May, 28, 1956

¹⁴ Docter, 132

¹⁵ Newton, 4

the two performers lay in the audience. Audiences for Bourbon were aware from the moment they entered the venue that they were going to see a man performing as a woman. Audiences for Jorgensen were aware that the woman they were going to see on the stage had previously been a man. Bourbon performed in both gay and tourist clubs, while Jorgensen performed solely in what would be deemed tourist clubs if they had dealt exclusively with drag performance. Tourist clubs were venues run by heterosexual management where heterosexual audiences would come to see drag performances. These clubs depended on the acts for financial success and audiences would cycle through at a constant rate. Gay clubs, in contrast, were either gay or straight owned but catered to a homosexual audience. These clubs were local hangouts and often the same audience would be there night after night to watch the performances as the gay bars served more as community meeting place than a performance venue.¹⁶ Performers in these clubs were under constant pressure to change and vary their acts to maintain their appeal with audiences who had seen them perform multiple times. Bourbon's experience in this environment shows through in his live performances and the large repertoire of routines featured on his recordings. Jorgensen, on the other hand performed a heavily scripted show, at least at first, with little audience interaction or improv as she did not have the experience performing in front of live crowds that Bourbon had.

While in both cases, the performers of these shows were apparently subverting a rigid binary system, the audiences in the tourist clubs seem to be policing this system. The main draw for Jorgensen's show was likely curiosity on the part of the audiences. The media frenzy surrounding her return to the United States after her operation insured that her's would be an immediately recognizable name and as her skill on the stage was by most accounts mediocre, the desire to see in person the man who had become a woman drew both money and crowds. The

¹⁶ Ibid., 115

appeal of Bourbon was slightly different, but again, the draw for the audience was the chance to see a man transform into a woman.

This transformation is highlighted on the cover of Bourbon's album *An Evening in Copenhagen*. On the front cover of the album is featured a dapper looking man dressed in a tuxedo complete with mustache standing in front of a club which features pictures of drag performers in a display case. The listener to the record is being prepared for the contrast between the man they see before them and the feminine person they will encounter on the recording. Just as audiences to the stage show would be prepared to see on stage a man dressed as a woman, an apparent gender contradiction. In contrast to the masculinely dressed and posed Bourbon on the street in front of the Sugar Bowl Club there is a photograph of a drag performer in a display case behind him in which the male body has been feminized. This contrast speaks to the performative nature of drag. On the street, while not performing, the female impersonator wears the clothes of his own gender, but once on the stage the body is transformed and scrutinized under lights and the gaze of the audience. The title of this record is almost certainly a reference to Jorgensen and her operation. Jorgensen received her operation in 1952 in Copenhagen, Denmark, after which she changed her name from George to Christine and began living life as a woman. The recording was released prior to Jorgensen's taking the stage in nightclubs across the country and so to meet the demand to witness first hand the man-become-woman Bourbon's performance offered audiences one evening in Copenhagen, that is, one evening witnessing or hearing a man performing femininity. There is also a sexual connotation implicit in Bourbon's title, the idea of 'spending the night' with someone carries with it sexual meaning and the content of the recording is sexually explicit at times. The purchase of the record, in contrast to the live performance, offers an opportunity to bring the performance into the home of the listener who

can then listen to it privately and repeatedly. This creates an interesting state in which a recording is both more and less intimate than a live performance. The live performance afforded the audience the ability to see Bourbon for themselves and possibly participate in the show through live banter with the performer, an aspect which is common in drag. While the recording offered the owner the chance to listen to the performance multiple times, it lacks the first hand immediacy of seeing Bourbon dressed femininely on the stage.

For the drag performer, femininity lies in dress, mannerisms and appearance of physical anatomy. Rupp and Taylor mention the breast as the defining physical characteristic of being a woman.¹⁷ This explains the theatricality of pulling the bra which ends most strip performances in tourist bars. As the male genitalia would be pulled back to create a smooth front underneath any garments, revealing a flat chest becomes the most dramatic way to prove manhood (without risking a public indecency charge). Putting on falsies is an essential part of any performer's getting in to drag. Even Christine Jorgensen admits that she wore false breasts on the stage during her performances to enhance her physical appearance.¹⁸ When Christine Jorgensen came to the United States post operation she had hormonally augmented breasts she did not, however, have a surgically created vagina. Limitations in medical knowledge prevented her from receiving a vaginoplasty at that time, but she did receive one later. Even before the surgical creation of her vagina Jorgensen considered herself to be a woman both on and off the stage, further evidence of the breasts being a more defining characteristic of femininity. This is likely due to the nature of gender attribution which is most often the first of a series of judgements that are made upon encountering another human. Kessler and McKenna use the example "I knew he

¹⁷ Rupp and Taylor, 16

¹⁸ Christine Jorgensen "Transformation." *Christine Jorgensen Reveals*, Repeat the Beat Records 2005

was a man because he had a beard” when discussing gender attribution.¹⁹ Similarly, “I knew she was a woman because she had breasts” would be just as valid a statement of gender attribution. By donning false breasts drag performers, and Jorgensen complicate the nature of gender attribution since the first assumption no longer tells the whole story and is intentionally misleading to the gender attributer. While in the case of Jorgensen it may be correct to assume her womanhood because of her breasts, this is only one part of the story, in fact her body is one that presents a number of conflicts. So too does Bourbon’s body present a number of conflicts upon first viewing. In his opening routine on a live performance recorded at the Jewel Box in Kansas City, Bourbon makes numerous jokes about his falsies. Bourbon in this routine uses feminine pronouns to refer to himself, talks of having a husband, and admits that his breasts are false and that he is a man.²⁰ This play between outward physicality, inner gender core, and outward gender expression creates conflict central to drag.

This conflict finds its unique voice in camp. Camp is a system of humor common in drag performance that relies on incongruity and theatricality. Newton uses the example of flowers growing from a toilet bowl to illustrate what camp is.²¹ The incongruity between what is expected and what is experienced is part of what creates the humor of a camp performance. Bourbon’s performance exhibits all of the characteristics of camp. On the stage he identifies his gender as feminine but simultaneously admits that he is a man wearing false breasts. While generally used in reference to homosexual humor, Philip Core points out that that camp is performed by those “whose desire to conceal something and to reveal it at the same time made

¹⁹ Kessler and McKenna 16

²⁰ Bourbon, Rae *A Trick Ain’t Always A Treat*, UTC Records 1966

²¹ Newton 107

their behavior bizarre to our way of thinking.”²² So, for the drag performer camp refers to their play with the knowledge that their physical anatomy would be considered to be in conflict with an inner gender core and outward gender performance, the drag queen’s camp is evident to the performer and the audience. In the case of Jorgensen a close examination of her performance reveals the camp inherent. Jorgensen often opened her stage show with a song entitled “Welcome to My World.” This song alerts the audience that the world of Jorgensen’s stage show is not the same world from which they normal operate. The follow up to this is usually what Jorgensen described as her theme song, “I Enjoy Being a Girl.” The song is from *Flower Drum Song*, a Broadway musical, and lists characteristics of traditional femininity. Among these are swiveling hips, a girlish gait, and being dressed in something frilly.²³ Jorgensen, though a transexual, is still performing camp when she performs femininity because of the focus paid on performing such an exact form of femininity, one dependent on stereotypes and audience expectations. Also, Jorgensen’s song becomes a clever way for her to break the fourth wall and admit to the audience that her body has not always been the way it is now, highlighting her desire to conceal and reveal this fact from her audience. The incongruity between the earlier state of Jorgensen’s body and the state which it currently occupies make it and her performance a site of camp.

Camp becomes more than simply an expression of humor, but also a location for challenging the gender binary. Johnston writes in *Queering Tourism* that “Queer bodies ‘camp-up’ heteronormative notions of what it means to be gendered and sexualised.”²⁴ On the stage, Bourbon intentionally camps up the idea of gender and sex. He is a man who performs a man

²² Philip Core “From *Camp: The Lie that Tells the Truth*,” *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: a Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 81

²³ Jorgensen, “I Enjoy Being a Girl”

²⁴ Johnston, Lynda *Queering Tourism: Paradoxical performances at gay pride parades* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005) 31

performing a woman. He simultaneously performs both genders and sexes. He is not a ‘man’ playing a woman, but man playing a man who plays a woman, and a man who sometimes is simply a man dressed as a woman. His performance calls attention to the false nature of the two gender binary which defines the heteronormative ideal of gender and sex. Jorgensen’s performance becomes the performance of a woman playing a man who has become a woman. Again, this is not a simple act of passing or even cross-dressing, but a multilayered assault on the two sex and gender system. Judith Butler writes that “if one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive...because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently.”²⁵ Neither of these performers is simply a woman, but neither is either simply a man, or a man playing a woman. Butler continues to write that “*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body” In the case of Bourbon it is easy to see how the terms woman and feminine are being used to signify his male body throughout the act. Bourbon refers to himself often as a woman, he dresses in feminine clothing sings and speaks in a falsetto (except for occasions where he drops into a deep masculine voice for comic effect). Jorgensen’s body becomes a veritable battle ground of sex and gender. Though the external sexual organs that denote maleness had been removed from Jorgensen’s body before she began performing, not all the sexual organs that denote femaleness had not been created. Therefore Jorgensen’s physical body existed in a place between man and woman, masculine and feminine, making it a site of conflict.

Bodily marginal sites are sites of danger because they are sites of conflict. The drag performer or the transexual challenges the notion that outward physical biology creates an inner gender core which informs an outward gender performance. For the drag performer these three are in constant conflict, as is seen in the performance of Bourbon. Jorgensen writes that she

²⁵ Butler, 6

frequently experienced incidents in childhood in which her mannerisms would align more with her sister than her male friends. She recounts an incident in her childhood while attending an all boys summer camp in which other campers would ask if she were “really a girl dressed in boys clothing” as she did not want to participate in many of the games the boys would play.²⁶ These anecdotes reveal that Jorgensen felt that the masculinity of her childhood was a drag performance, as she was wearing the clothing and expressing the signifiers of the gender which she felt was not true to her inner core. The danger of existing on these margins ranges from legal sanctions like arrest to social sanctions such as being referred to by derogatory terms. The danger lie in the subversion of gender. As mentioned earlier, gender is usually the first piece of information attributed to some one, and by complicating gender attribution the drag performer or transexual complicates the first building block of social interaction. Instead of being able to neatly define a person into one of two gender categories the drag performer and the transexual present the audience with a series of contradictions about themselves and their sex and gender.

Drag is more than simply a lampooning of femininity, but a complicated expression of gender and sexuality. By putting on women’s clothing and performing femininity the female impersonator or drag queen is asserting that “my ‘outside’ is feminine,” during performance but that the “‘inside’ [the body] is masculine” appearance is an illusion. For Jorgensen before her operation, however, the “outside,” her body, her appearance and her gender were masculine while the “inside,” what she felt, was feminine. For Jorgensen the hormone injections and operation brought the outside and the inside to harmony. Now she looked and felt feminine the inside and the outside were aligned. In performances Bourbon makes many contradictory claims about his gender and sex, mainly to humorous effect. Bourbon’s body (his “inside”) remained

²⁶ Jorgensen, Christine and Susan Stryker *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* 2nd Ed (New York: Cleis Press 2005) 15

masculine while the “outside” (dress and mannerisms) became feminine for the purposes of performance. Bourbon achieved femininity through clothing, make-up, and false breasts.

Jorgensen achieved it through hormone injections and surgical operations.

While Bourbon’s femininity can clearly be referred to as an act or a performance, since he did not dress or act as a woman off stage, but so too Jorgensen was performing her gender on the stage. Simon de Beauvoir wrote that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one,” while she was referring to women generally and not on the stage, it remains true for Jorgensen and Bourbon too. Jorgensen, biologically, was not born a woman, but she transformed her body through her lifetime to be congruous with her ideal of the feminine. On the stage Jorgensen did not make explicit that she had once been a man, but she did hint at the transformation that she had undergone, singing “I Enjoy Being a Girl” and “Welcome to My World.” Without mentioning her previous sex status Jorgensen makes clear that she prefers the changes that have been made to her physically. Jorgensen is performing her sex on the stage by asserting her sex on the stage. The audience which is aware of the transformation that has occurred sees Jorgensen’s show not as a woman singing, dancing, and having witty banter with the audience but as a man-turned-woman. For the success of her act it becomes essential for Jorgensen to seem to be acting naturally. Bourbon’s audiences would have been aware that he was a man performing, and his act relied not on a naturalness of action, but an exaggerated action to achieve femininity. For the heterosexual audience the performance is not an act of passing from one gender to another, but a performance that highlights the feminine to the point of being comical. On the stage words and actions are used to “reveal one’s intentions” and then to “elicit certain desired responses” from an audience.²⁷ For Bourbon the desired response was laughter, and while Jorgensen also desired

²⁷ Perinbanayagam, R. S., *Signifying Acts: Structure and Meaning in Everyday Life* (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985) 60

laughter and applause from the audience, she also desired general acceptance of her transformation into a woman. This was not achieved through an exaggeration of feminine traits but through a performance of normality on the stage. Jorgensen performed as a normal woman, Bourbon performed as a caricature of a woman, or even as a caricature of a man playing a woman. But their performances also relied on the location of their show.

Gender performances on the street are different than in the bedroom, or the classroom. Johnston's work on queer tourism focuses a chapter on Pride Parades in which she writes that "bodies and places are mutually constituted and hence bodies are gendered and sexualised according to particular times and places."²⁸ The same is true for the drag performance. The tourist bar is an interesting location of sexual and gender confrontation. The audience is heterosexual (at least in how it is treated), yet the location serves as a venue for observing queerness on the stage. Unlike the Pride Parades which Johnston describes in her work as being locations in which queer bodies enter heterosexual spaces, the tourist bar is not an entirely heteronormative location. While the audience is heterosexual, they have come specifically to watch a performance in which heteronormative ideas are challenged, namely the idea that the male body is naturally masculine and not feminine. The audiences become gender tourists, leaving their every day lives behind for a few hours and peering into a world that they do not participate in. The audience views the performance through a heteronormative lens, which is necessarily a male lens. Performers become objects to be scrutinized for gender inconsistencies which give away the 'true' or 'biologically' nature of the body being viewed. This is why the removal of the bra at the end of a drag strip performance is so striking. The performer until that point has very carefully maintained a feminine performance but at the last minute reveals that the feminine has been achieved by a male body. If performed successfully, the drag strip

²⁸ Johnston, 31

intentionally subjects a male body to the male sexual gaze, intentionally making it an object of sexual desire by heterosexuals. In fact, strip performances are rarely performed at gay clubs because there is less audience interest in viewing the feminized male body sexually. The audience comes to view a disconnect between the outward and the inner nature of the performer.

The disconnect between outer and inner and outer is a place where gender is heavily subverted by drag. Butler writes that “it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized and that this idealizations an effect of a corporeal significations.”²⁹ The performances of female impersonators and drag queens become sources of ‘gender trouble’ that is they attack gender because they are performances in which there is an incoherence between the internal and the external, and that the external is otherized of the ‘natural’ internal of the body. Sex and gender here are in direct conflict. Drag performance presents an attack on the “public regulation of fantasy [of the reality of gender] through the surface politics of the body.”³⁰ Drag performances go against such public regulation seemingly, but they also simultaneously reinforce it in some ways. While they don the garb and adopt the mannerisms of the opposing gender during their performances, drag performers, as Newton notes, also seem to be questioning the naturalness of the gender binary by achieving the ‘wrong’ gender, implying that gender is also achieved by the ‘right’ sex. While drag performance does involve the ‘achievement’ of gender by the ‘wrong’ sex, it relies on the exaggeration of gender, not the exact replication. Thereby drag can be read to reinforce gender tropes since becoming recognizably female for a performer requires the performer to hone in on and display characteristics that define femininity - gaudy dress, swaying hips, the sexualization of the body. Female impersonation relies on signifiers of femininity that often contribute to reinforcing stereotypes of the feminine gender. However, the act of othering

²⁹ Butler 136

³⁰ Ibid.

the body through drag does serve as a protest against the heteronormative gender structure which prescribes gender based on the biological sexing of the body.

Jorgensen's case complicates matters much further. By surgically altering the anatomical sex of her body, Jorgensen is removing the outer gender core which is supposed to inform the creation of gender. Gender is supposed to be based on an inner gender core from which the outward manifestations of gender originate, yet the inner core is based on the outward physical biology of the body. Drag and Jorgensen complicate the inner/outer dichotomy by refuting the outward physical biology in favor of an inner gender core which contradicts it and then expresses this inner core outwardly through dress, gestures, speech, and performance. Heterosexual audiences are presented with a performance rife with contradiction. The record cover of *An Evening in Copenhagen* demonstrates this contradiction perfectly. There is a conflict between the dapper, masculinely dressed Ray Bourbon in the photograph with the pictures of female impersonators featured in a display case behind him. There is also a contrast between the spelling 'Ray' on the sign in the photograph advertising the performance and 'Rae' the script over the photograph for the recording. Bourbon, originally Ray, became exclusively billed as 'Rae,' a feminized version of his name, following his claims at having a sex change. The spelling change is likely in reference to Mae West, with whom he had performed on Broadway, and whose name is almost always mentioned in any articles referring to Bourbon, including his *New York Times* obituary.³¹ The audience of the record or performance then faces the contradiction between the masculine Bourbon featured on the cover and the feminized performance on the stage. The image of Bourbon on the cover seem 'natural' that is, the physical biology, inner gender core, and outward gender appears all seem to be in line with the heteronormative standard. Then we see the feminized version of Bourbon on the stage, here there is a conflict between the inner

³¹ "Rae Bourbon, a Protege of Mae West, Dead at 78" *New York Times* 22 July 1971

gender core and the outward gender appearance, knowing that Bourbon is a man, the audience assumes that his inner core is masculine and therefore the only conflict is with the physical dressing of the body. But Bourbon adds a third contradiction once he begins his performance. Now the audience see that there is a conflict between the physical biology and the inner gender core. Bourbon refers to himself with feminine pronouns calling himself a woman or a girl and he talks of being intimate with men. In fact, the outward gender appearance and the inner gender core are in line it is the physical biology that provides the conflict. This is where Jorgensen becomes radically different than Bourbon and other impersonators. Jorgensen took steps to make her outward physical biology match her inner gender core. Jorgensen, it would seem, attempts to be perfectly heteronormative by changing physicality to match gender feelings.

Newton reports that some female impersonators and drag queens felt that audiences in tourist bars, heterosexual audiences, could seem hostile towards the performer.³² The feeling of the performer of hostility in the crowd raises an interesting question. If the audience is hostile towards the performer, why are they at the performance to begin with? Daniel Jones reports that he sometimes faces hostility after performances of Jomama Jones, most often from men who were not aware that Jones was a man playing a woman.³³ Jones' show is unique compared to the Bourbon and Jorgensen in that the audience is unaware that Jomama Jones is a female character played by a man. He feels that the audience members that are hostile are upset because they feel they have been tricked by his performances, that they were given false information with which to attribute his gender. After changing her show and adapting it towards the nightclub, Jorgensen does not report any hostility from audiences, and certainly the amounts she was making per week seem to indicate that the attendance to her performances was healthy enough to demand an

³² Newton, 65

³³ Jones, 8 Dec 2010

\$8,000 a week fee which almost ten times the amount that the average female impersonator made for a similar show. Jorgensen's show performance capitalized on the media sensation surrounding her sex change.

Jorgensen operation came at the perfect time to capture the minds of the American public through the news media. As George Jorgensen Jr she had served in the military at the end of World War Two, providing her with the GI Benefits which allowed for her travel to Copenhagen and her operations. Long suffering from a feeling that her outward biology was not in line with her 'true' self, Jorgensen was influenced by the book *The Male Hormone* which she encountered while working at a library. Believing hormone injections would be the solution to her inner turmoil Jorgensen acquired estrogen shots from a local pharmacy using her medical student's ID to convince the pharmacist the drugs were to be used in a research experiment and began to inject herself with the hormones³⁴. She reports that upon the start of this self-administered shot regimen her mood improved dramatically, she no longer felt restless, and she became self-motivated for the first time in her life. In Denmark Jorgensen found Dr. Hamburger who became the head physician in Jorgensen's operations and hormone treatments.

Audiences many have been more willing to see Jorgensen perform femininity because she had removed the sexual organs of the male body, therefore she was not performing the 'wrong' gender, but instead her outward gender was in accordance with her physical biology. Or perhaps these audiences were coming to Jorgensen's performances in order to see for themselves whether Jorgensen's claim was true. Therefore, for Jorgensen to be successful she needs to be 'perfectly' feminine, while Bourbon's success depends on an understanding that he is not trying to be perfectly feminine, but merely to display some traits of femininity for the purposes of entertainment. Bourbon's claim at having a sex change was seen by some as an attempt to avoid

³⁴ Docter, 70-75

legal persecution for his profession, as it was illegal in most states to cross-dress at the time, and Bourbon had some run ins with the law, as exemplified by the photo series on the back of his recording showing his arrest from the Sugar Bowl, and New Orleans's club, the same club that he was photographed in front on the front cover of *An Evening in Copenhagen*. The contrast between these two images is striking. In the same location, on the same corner, Bourbon has no problem posing for a picture dressed as a man, exhibiting masculinity, but on the same spot in a dress and Bourbon is under arrest.

Both of these performers used their position on the stage as a location to subvert and critique gender through drag and camp. Bourbon's performance lampooned the idea of a two gender binary through humor. On the stage a biological male dressed as a woman and referred to himself with feminine pronouns while maintaining that his 'true' gender was male. Jorgensen, as a transexual, changed her body in order to perform the gender that she felt as more in tune with her inner feelings off the stage, but then she took this performance onstage in her act. The two performers show possible alternatives to the gender norms inherent in a heteronormative system, and their performances provide an opening for discourse on sex and gender.