

Kate Bush: Performing and Creating Queer Subjectivities on *Lionheart*.

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*I know I'm artificial
But don't put the blame on me
I was reared with appliances
In a consumer society
--X – Ray Spex 'Art – I – ficial'¹*

In her second album, *Lionheart*, Kate Bush continued the process of exploring gender roles through music, performance and dramatization that began on her debut, *The Kick Inside*. From early on in her career, Bush was conscious of how heteronormative, patriarchal gender roles can delimit restrictive boundaries and designate permissible sites from which the female sexed subject can speak or sing. From her perceptive comments in interviews, it is clear that she was aware of stereotypical cultural notions of femininity circulating within pop music in the late 70s that, I would suggest, only allowed narrow roles for women singers: to be genteel, emotional and reflective. Understandably, Bush wished to distance herself and ultimately break free from these constructions and often spoke of how she identified with male songwriters and styles as they allowed for more experimentation.²

In the first album, she had traversed the impasse of sex and gender by creating an autoerotic female subject that enabled new subject positions for the female sexed subject to emerge. She did this by drawing inspiration from the female body and inscribing its desire within the record's grooves and also, by celebrating counter female or feminine mythologies. Thus *The Kick Inside*'s power emerges from the treatment of the female body and the possibilities of what it can do, create and generate.

The album that followed, *Lionheart*, was released in the same year as *The Kick Inside*, reaching the public in November 1978. The main factor that holds *Lionheart* together as a successful concept album is the production and presentation of the songs that emphasise a great pleasure in performance. The themes in the album explore role play, acting, scripts, stories, and the theatricality inherent to entertainment and show business. The hyperbolic orchestral arrangements communicate an atmosphere of

¹ X-Ray Spex *Germfree Adolescents* CMDDD369 LC 6448.

² Obviously this position is plagued with problems – it is almost rejecting the possibility of a progressive female songwriting style, even if she did develop it herself.

melodrama and parody and it is in these that I would argue the ‘queerness’, ‘campness’ and ‘performative’ nature of the album manifests itself and flourishes. It is therefore no surprise that many of the songs on *Lionheart* are based around the *idea* of acting and performance. On the back cover, Bush is wearing theatre mask earrings as if to point to the themes that are on the record. Rob Jovanovich suggests the fixation on performance that saturates the album can be explained by the fact the album was to form the theatrical inspiration for the ‘Tour Of Life’ that Bush would embark upon in 1979. He states that “She had wanted the new material to fit in with her advanced vision of what that tour should be: a totally theatrical experience unlike the usual rock and pop shows of her contemporaries.”³ This pragmatic insight into the motivation for the record suggests that *Lionheart*, perhaps more than any other Kate Bush album, was music made for performance in mind. With this comes the possibility of inhabiting and exploring new characters and positions that are, perhaps, granted easier access within the freedom of performance that is a structured, or culturally acceptable, space of transgressive exploration.⁴

In the passages that follow I will demonstrate how *Lionheart* as an album challenges many boundaries of gendered ‘correctness.’ In terms of her own public persona though, how far did Kate Bush go in order to stir up gender trouble that can be found in numerous instances on the album? Visually, Bush made scarcely any attempt to visibly cross genders and confound the gender boundaries that she was aware confined many female song writers of her generation. She did not, like Annie Lennox for example, dress as a man in order to avoid *and* confront the sexist and stereotypical constrictions upon women artists that were prevalent in the music industry and popular culture at large in the late 1970’s and early 80’s. There is a little sign that she resisted or chose to resist gender roles in this way⁵. In her early promotional videos she appears with her trademark flowing brown hair in clothes that emphasised her female-ness, even if the dance routines in the videos displayed a female body in active movement that utilised macho posturing to create its powerful effect. It may be worth noting though that Bush appears on the front cover of *Lionheart* dressed in a lion’s costume that conceals the contours of her body. This

³ Rob Jovanovich *Kate Bush: The Biography*, London: Portrait, 2005, p 85.

⁴ I am thinking here of the Bakhtinian notion of Carnival or the Carnavalesque.

⁵ Kate Bush did become famous at a time when music video was beginning to be used as a medium through which to dramatise the popular song. The early videos were quite minimal in this sense – i.e. Bush’s videos were interested in interpreting the song & did little to push or question boundaries. MTV started in 1981. Black people weren’t allowed on MTV until 1984.

could point to a certain type of gender ambiguity as she masquerades as a pretty young man wearing make up and a crimped wig that serves to recall the heyday of the 'glam' era. She stares aggressively and seductively at the camera in a predatory, but ultimately camp fashion.

If not through the deliberate visible crossing of gender, then how does *Lionheart* as a 'musical text', communicate camp and muddle gender boundaries? Elizabeth Wood, in her article 'Sapponics,' points to the transgressive quality of certain female voices that can slide through an extreme number of vocal registers:

The extreme range in one female voice from richly dark deep chest tones to piercingly clear high falsetto, and its defective break at crossing register borders, produces an effect I call sonic cross dressing – a merging rather than splitting of 'butch' authority and 'femme' ambiguity, an acceptance and integration of male and female.⁶

Kate Bush is of course famous for her piercingly high vocals and on *Lionheart* her vocals seem at times uncomfortably high pitched. What perhaps gets missed however is how deep her voice can also go, how aggressive and macho this can be and how she can often slide between these two extreme pitches within a song. Wood goes on to describe the 'Sapponic voice' as one that "is a transvestic enigma, belonging to neither male nor female as constructed".⁷ In Bush's voice alone, a case of sonic cross-dressing can be discerned, one that integrates both male and female – a vocal space that has the possibility of occupying a number of positions within a widened spectrum that stretches the two poles of the male/ female binary (and all other binaries that correspond to this troublesome pairing). Therefore the very nature of her singing voice has the power to intrude into gendered positions that would normatively serve to demarcate and re-instate fixed boundaries of familiar and restrictive gender roles.

It follows on that Bush's 'transvestic' voice destabilises cultural norms because of the range that it can encompass. In this very functional way, we can understand how Bush's primary instrument enabled her to depart from the gentle, stereotypical feminine music (that she did not want to be seen to be making), and that the flexibility of her vocal instrument enabled her to move into a 'masculine' space,

⁶ Elizabeth Wood 'Sapponics' in *Queering the Pitch*, London: Routledge, 1994. 32.

⁷ Ibid, 32.

even if only to use it as a parodist tool or to harness it for female power. For the female songwriter and performer, moving into ‘masculine space’ opens up new sites from which to speak. Her voice was undoubtedly one of the many mechanisms that enabled her to pursue different and explorative mediums of expression in her work and it is one that works upon its ability to startle the listener into new experiences of perception and desire. As with the ‘Sapphonic’ voice, she is creating a new vocal subjectivity ‘belonging neither to male or female *as constructed*’,⁸ but something and somewhere entirely different to what is familiar and commonly ‘known’ in terms of a vocal spectrum.

Peter Pan and the genderl(e)oss body

It seems no coincidence that a figure such as Peter Pan should feature prominently on *Lionheart*, an album that celebrates the sliding between genders and bodies in performance as a means to negotiate escape or stall the inevitability of one’s sexed and gendered position. In the figure of Peter Pan, we see embodied an intransigent resistance to the norms of adulthood with its conventions and rules that oppress people through narrow and segregated gender roles. Peter Pan escapes the adult world precisely because he can (despite the use of the gendered pronoun) escape gender, or at least, the character has the advantage of experiencing being both, due to his androgyny. This version Peter Pan that Bush privileges is the one that has come to suggest the very possibility of indeterminate gender within the western cultural imaginary, rather than the Pan of J.M. Barrie’s novel who assumes a traditionally masculine and authoritarian leadership role.⁹ In versions of the play, the Pan figure is often still played by a female and this may have been a strong factor for Bush who chose to explore and develop the Pan mythology in the second song on *Lionheart*, ‘In Search of Peter Pan.’

Sheila Whitely has commented how Peter Pan, the ‘genderless androgyne of pre-pubescence, who evades adult sexuality and refuses to grow up, seems initially to be a curious causality to the lion/lioness’¹⁰ hero(ine) of Bush’s album. In many ways though, Peter Pan is a highly appropriate figure through which to express the anxiety felt by Bush regarding the extreme limitation of roles available to women within

⁸ *ibid*, 32.

⁹ Thank you to Sarah Gamble for pointing this out to me.

¹⁰ Sheila Whitely *Too Much Too Young*, London: Routledge, 2005. 74.

patriarchal society, as well as using Pan as a vehicle to comment on the (unnecessary) pain of gender socialisation. Reading the song with this in mind, I would argue that it is rich in its critique of normative gender roles that we are forced to comply and contend with from birth. The title itself is suggestive of yearning and movement, or the yearning for movement. The song is told from the perspective of a speaker who is on the cusp of growing up, their gender is not stated and shifts fluidly in the song so that it cannot quite be pinned down, and like Peter Pan, remaining in an indeterminate gendered state.

It's been such a long week,
So much crying.
I no longer see a future.
*I've been told, when I get older
That I'll understand it all
But I'm not sure if I want to (italics mine).*¹¹

In the last three lines of opening verse we hear the voice of the child that has been told by authority figures that they will learn to accept the rules and conventions of society when they grow up and consequently, lose large parts of themselves in order to fit into it. This in itself can be read as a queer critique of heteronormative concepts of time. As Judith Halberstam comments, queer resistance to conventional adulthood can be read in terms of a 'politics of refusal – the refusal to grow up and enter heteronormative adulthoods implied by these concepts of progress and maturity.'¹² The last line of the verse hints that there are other models of experience, even if the resounding tone of the speaker is one of resignation and dejection.

In the second verse the speaker is consoled by their granny who chides them for being 'too sensitive' (*LH*) – typically feminine behaviour – and that this 'makes me sad. /She makes me feel like an old man' (*LH*), that again conjures up interesting gendered allusions and confusions. The chorus is equally destabilising on this point: 'When, When I am a man/ I will be an astronaut, /And find Peter Pan' (*LH*). It is interesting that this yearning is exclusive to men: only when the speaker is a *man* can they grow up to be astronaut. This yearning is emphasised by repeated and insistent 'when,' accentuated by how this statement is delivered - rising up like a spaceship before scattering like stardust. With the knowledge of the gendered status of the

¹¹ Kate Bush *Lionheart* EMA 787 OC 064-06 859, 1978, EMI. All further references from the album will be followed by abbreviated initials in parentheses as follows: (*LH*).

¹² Judith Halberstam *In a Queer Time and Place*, New York: New York University Press, 2005. 179.

author, coupled with the deliberately ambiguous gendered status of the speaker in the song, I think it is possible to read the chorus as critiquing the limited spaces of transgression and flight for women in society. However the song also creates space for a trans-gendered subjectivity to emerge, if we take the meaning of the 'trans' prefix to mean the movement towards the transformation of gender identity: from a little girl wishing/ wanting/ waiting until she can become a man. The figure of the astronaut here becomes a crucial metaphor as a figure suggestive of action, movement, flight, daringness and imagination.

'In Search of Peter Pan' further destabilises heteronormative gendered and sexual positions by containing an instance of male narcissism: 'Dennis loves to look in the mirror,/ He tells me that he is beautiful' (*LH*). This later becomes a larger allusion to homo-eroticism, 'He's got a photo,/ Of his hero,/ He keeps it under his pillow' (*LH*). The speaker on the other hand has a pin up of Peter Pan that they 'found...in a locket, I hide it in my pocket' (*LH*), with the locket being a traditionally female symbol that again confuses the boundaries of gender. In both cases there is an element of secrecy and shame about coveting these pictures: one is hid under a pillow, while the other is hidden in a pocket. This may of course simply be part of the 'game' of being a child, but it could also be an awareness of the transgressive gendered and sexual desires that the song dramatises, and that these statements make publicly known.

Ultimately I think that 'In Search Of Peter Pan' offers a subtle yet convincing argument for the right of all people to be free of the gendered expectations that society places upon us. The use of 'When you wish upon a star' (*LH*) from the Disney film *Pinocchio* at the end of the song, further stresses the plaintive innocence of this statement while also connecting it with the Pan mantra that is quoted directly in the chorus: 'Second Star on the right/ Straight on 'til morning' (*LH*). The closing message of the song affirms that it 'Makes no difference who you are,' (*LH*) so that all people regardless of class, gender, race and all the other categories that structurally subject us, can have freedom to access this dream of possibility and realisation. In this song Bush creates a fluid, shifting and 'transgressive' gendered subject in order to critique the restrictive heteronormative and patriarchal gender roles and conceptions of time. The song is saturated with pain of binary gender's limitation and the yearning to escape, while privileging the imagination as the arena where we can achieve this.

Camp, theatre and engaging with artifice

The theatrical ambience of *Lionheart* often means that Kate Bush ventures into the realm of camp performance as a means of accentuation. Her use of camp involves an interesting twist of vocal and subjective transvestism: she can be a woman performing as a man who in turn is adopting, parodying and inhabiting female characteristics. The evocative camp performance on the album resonates with a certain type of male homosexual culture and to this day, Bush has been heralded as a higher class of camp gay (male) icon for the twenty first Century. Nathan Evans has commented in an article published in *The Pink Paper* 2005: ‘mainstream gay culture has Kylie or Madonna. But Kate’s fantastically camp. She’s a one off eccentric. I really don’t think her image was constructed in an ironic way. She was just being herself.’¹³ Evans suggests that the alternative, fantastic and *genuinely* eccentric aspect of Bush’s persona place her apart from the plasticity of mainstream gay culture. Kate Bush’s appeal to a queer audience is not simply her histrionic performances and lavish costumes but the fact she has, at certain times in her career, presented herself as *authentically* camp. The idea, however, of a non-ironic and authentic type of camp performance/ identity is at odds with how camp has been defined and used within culture in the first instance.

Like many things, there has been some contention over the definition and meaning of ‘camp.’ It is worth making clear what definitions and ideas I am referring to and using as a framework in order to read Bush’s campest moments on *Lionheart*. Most consistently camp has been associated with ‘a mode of performance that exposes as artifice what passes as natural.’¹⁴ It therefore easy to see why camp, as a political tool, was historically and contemporarily of use to gay people, who could use camp to query the naturalisation of heterosexuality within culture and exposing its artificiality. I enjoy Richard Dyer’s definition of camp:

Camp can make us see that what art and the media give us are not the Truth or Reality but fabrications, particular ways of talking about the world, particular understandings and feelings of the way that life is. Art and the media don’t give us life as it really is – how could they ever? – but only life as artists and producers think it is. Camp, by drawing attention to the artifices employed by artists, can constantly remind us that what we are seeing is a only view of life. This doesn’t

¹³ Nathan Evans in *The Pink Paper*, September 2005.

¹⁴ Gillian Rodger ‘Drag, Camp and Gender Subversion in the music and video of Annie Lennox’ in *Popular Music* (2004), 23: 17-29 Cambridge University Press. 26.

stop us enjoying it, but it does stop us believing what we are shown too readily.¹⁵

Camp, in Dyer's definition, is a strategy, a mode of perception and a critical tool that allows us, as readers, consumers and listeners, to not accept all that is presented before us as the only truth and way of seeing the world. Importantly Dyer stresses that this does not curtail the enjoyment of what is being experienced, even as it offers a space for the reader of a cultural text to resist it. Camp has then, the *potential*¹⁶ to be radically sceptical of any totality, exposing what is invisibly accepted as the norm and 'authentically' natural. Its stress is upon engaging with artifice as a device in order to reveal what we pretend is not artificial *is* in actual fact, artificial. It is a 'style that favours "exaggeration," artifice and extremity...[it] exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture or consumerist culture.'¹⁷ Camp could fragment and denaturalise heteronormative narratives of appropriate cultural behaviour – the sanctity of the family, marriage, monogamy, religion and so forth. On the other hand, camp is equally welcomed by a culture steeped in capitalist values because capitalism cares little whether something pretends to be real or not – it markets it, makes it seem irresistible and desirable to everyone, making the authentic artificial.

Isherwood's definition of 'high camp' is perhaps most appropriate for what Bush does on *Lionheart*, as it emphasises a certain quality of decadence and seriousness to the ploy of camping about: 'You camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun *of* it, you're making fun *out* of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance.'¹⁸ This definition of camp seems particularly suitable for the camper moments that exist on *Lionheart* which are certainly executed within this type of framework. There is often gravity to the songs that co-exist with the more humorous aspects and whilst revelling in their artificiality (she is telling fictional stories) and elegance,(the music and vocal performance are well constructed and executed). What is clear about the various definitions surrounding camp is that artifice is a fundamental aspect of camp. Bush uses this aspect of camp, as we will see, to challenge many of the things that surround

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, London: Routledge 2002. 60.

¹⁶ Of course, just because something has the potential for critique this does not mean that it is employed effectively.

¹⁷ Gillian Rodger 'Drag, Camp and Gender Subversion in the music and video of Annie Lennox' *Popular Music* (2004): 23: 26.

¹⁸ Isherwood quoted in Rodger, 26.

us within culture that posture as natural. Embracing artifice is thus a key to engaging, challenging and changing the world around us.

The most obvious example of these strategies can be found in the single released from the album, 'Wow.' Based in the ruthless world of show-business, the song contains a teasing critique of the entertainment industry, its routines and the roles people have to play in order to get anywhere within it. Equally, the song can be referring to the roles we play in everyday life that often fall, when we begin to learn them, into predictable forms:

We're all alone on the stage tonight,
We've been told we're not afraid of you,
We know all our lines so well, ah-ha,
We've said them so many times,
Time and time again,
Line and line again (*LH*).

The song also gently plays upon the hypocrisy of the industry and glamorises failure in the face of flattery and dissimulation, whilst telling the story of the young gay man who'll never 'Be that movie queen/ He's too busy hitting the Vaseline,' (in the video Bush pouts at the camera knowingly and spans her bottom in accordance with singing this line). The chorus of the song with the repeated 'Wows' communicate the wonder and magic of showbiz, while the ambivalent 'unbelievable' at the end of the chorus points to the tension between fantasy and reality, that theatre and performance straddle. The chorus also demonstrates the vocal cross-dressing that Wood describes in 'Sapphonic,' as the 'Wows' oscillate through a scale in their repetitions, beginning in the middle register before soaring impossibly high before going low again and then finishing astoundingly with the high release of the final 'unbelievable.'

The song is also a comment on the very obvious artificial nature of acting, as if to assure those credulous viewers and listeners that what they see before them is not real, that it is rather, artifice. This of course relies on Bush's audience being absolutely intoxicated by the magic of performance and points to a will that hovers between wanting and not wanting the spell to be broken: 'When the actor reaches his death/ You know it's not for real, he just holds his breath.'¹⁹ This may be one of the recurring themes of the album – an absolute childlike belief that invites you

¹⁹ Kate Bush *Lionheart*.

plaintively but is in danger of breaking the spell right before your very ears. ‘In Search of Peter Pan,’ discussed earlier, represents this idea.

There are many instances when the album utilises the outrageous tone of histrionic male campness and theatricality that creates, I would argue, the album’s enduring tone and feeling. As Bush commented, referring to the inspiration for ‘Wow’, ‘there are an awful lot of homosexuals in the business. But that is just an observation, not a criticism.’²⁰ Camp communication to the listener is best exemplified in the two songs that close the album, ‘Coffee Homeground’ and ‘Hammer Horror.’ These songs both display for me all the fun that can be gained from engaging with elegance and artifice. ‘Coffee Homeground’ opens with swaggering and swooping tones that envelop the listener like overbearing feather plumes. The music evokes entering a cellar or a boardroom as we are drawn into the mood of the song, which is about a man who poisons his guests by putting belladonna in their food and drink. Bush described it as ‘a humorous aspect of paranoia really and we sort of done it [sic] in a Brechtian style, the old sort of German [??? Vibe sic] to try and bring across the humour side of it.’²¹ The song certainly conjures the decadent aspects of 1920’s Berlin with its lurching, polka movements and with an isolated symbol clash that delivers the punch line in-between the stop-start of the music.

Despite the appearance of the music being created with a large orchestra, the sound of the horns and ethereal flutes are in fact made by a synthesizer, which is the ultimate artificial instrument. The use of synthesizers is another instance of how artifice creeps its way into the album’s body, thus making it more elaborate than it necessarily appears to be. Synthesizers feature on the campiest songs on the album – ‘Wow,’ ‘Coffee’ and ‘Hammer’ – while the other songs use more traditional instruments. This is no easy coincidence when considering how the atmosphere is created; for what we think of as ‘natural’ instruments are in fact programmed and simulated sounds.

‘Coffee Homeground’ could also be read aloud as a script, written and performed with a spanking and flick of the wrist:

Offer me a chocolate,
No thankyou, spoil my diet, *know your game!*
But tell me just how come

²⁰ http://children.ofthenight.org/cloudbusting/music/lionheart_album.html

²¹ http://children.ofthenight.org/cloudbusting/music/lionheart_album.html (1978, Lionheart Promo)

They smell of bitter almonds?
It's a no-no to your coffee homeground²².

The song is importantly humorous which is all the more surprising given that it is about murder. It is in keeping with Isherwood's definition of high camp that makes fun 'out' of something as opposed to 'of' something. In this song we gain the full sense of theatricality and entertainment, as the song itself becomes a kind of play, with the use of instruments and extra voices functioning as characters. Bush's songs are often conceived as complex little stories that are conceived as their own dramatic world and the final song on the album, 'Hammer Horror', is no different.

The song opens with an extended hold on one note, a wall of noise that builds the anticipation and intrigue before a cymbal crashes, and a piano comes in and is struck up and down the scale. Again, a synthesizer flourishes in the background before the singing begins and the focus is placed on the voice, bass guitar and piano. It is appropriate to talk of this song and 'Coffee' as elaborate and orchestral because of the care that has gone into perfecting each particular part of the song. 'Hammer Horror,' despite its elegance and beautiful melodrama, is quite an odd pop song because of the number of structural changes and mutations it undergoes along its journey. Again, like 'Coffee,' it is theatrical and is more akin to a mini play or musical, and all the instruments and use of Bush's voice contribute to the atmosphere. Bush's low voice is used to deliver the main story, while her high pitched voice is used to echo, emphasise and build the melodrama of the song, so that her voices come at you from a number of different places and positions all at once. 'Hammer Horror' ends with the sound of large gong cymbal that signifies the closing of the curtains on the play and indeed, the whole album.

The song lends itself to this treatment because it is also based in the world of theatre. As Bush commented: 'The song is not about, as many think, Hammer Horror films. It is about an actor and his friend.'²³ The friend dies just as he is about to have the main part in the play – The Hunchback of Notre Dame. The speaker of the song has to take his place and is haunted by the ghost, and this is where the energy of the song emerges. Like the song 'Kashka from Baghdad,' discussed elsewhere in this chapter, there connection between male homosexual love and death is being alluded to:

²² 'Coffee Homeground' Italics mine.

²³ http://children.ofthenight.org/cloudbusting/music/lionheart_album.html

Who calls me from the other side,
Of the street?
And who taps me on the shoulder?
I turn around, but you're gone.

I've got a hunch that you're following,
To get your own back on me
So all I want to do is forget you, friend.²⁴

It is interesting that the speaker of the song is supposed to be a man, but again in the video for the song, there is no attempt by Bush to 'perform' at this gendered role in the clothes that she wears, even if she does engage in some macho posturing of her fists as the routine intensifies. The video is based on a dance routine with an anonymous, male, blindfolded partner who comes up behind Bush and grapples with her, the movement is (deliberately) not spontaneous, but scripted, so that they both resemble poets, not live actors.²⁵ The cross dressing and camp performance of the song occurs within the musical text – within the narrative of the story and through the use of voices and instruments. Does this make it more or less subversive given the fact that we may not be totally conscious or aware of what Bush is doing, as we are swept into a lush play of fantasy, reality and artifice, not confounded by the *visible* shifting of gender? Is she even performing a type of camp masculinity or femininity, or is it that she is creating a position from which to speak from, that integrates the two and moves beyond the binary?

I would argue that Bush deploys camp performance, posture, literary and musical devices in *Lionheart* as a means of negotiating the narrow position that she, as a woman singer, was confined to. It was a resistant strategy and one that occurred within the body of the musical texts she created and the album contains a number of instances of musical and vocal transvestism that have been explored above. Having the flexibility to imagine herself speak and project her persona from a 'male' position – no matter how much this deviated from normative masculinity – widened the possibilities of what she could sing about. Undoubtedly she utilises performance as a

²⁴ 'Hammer Horror.'

²⁵ I think this is one of the strange things about watching dance routines on a TV, particularly ones that are routines. For while there is displayed a certain freedom of movement, there are always distinct limits to the movement, and again, like the recorded song, they are frozen, paradoxically in their movement, in that they are subject to repetition. So that dance – something which is central to freedom, celebration, emancipation, movement, becomes contained and somewhat uncomfortable & indeed, unlike a dance at all.

vehicle to explore the possibility of transformation even if this metamorphosis is not permanent, but can be used as a tool to negotiate the restrictions of living in a particular sexed body. Admittedly, this change ends when the play or song does, but it still has the potential to be repeated, lived and experienced again (for the listener) because of its recorded form. The fact that the presence of 'high camp' can be detected in more subtle manifestations on the musical text of *Lionheart* – through the use of voices, themes, instruments, humour and parody detailed above - display a cunning use of this strategy to expose and ultimately to explore, the artifice of fantasy, reality and all that poses as natural within culture.

Creation, loss and subversion.

Whether or not a woman performing a number of gendered positions is a subversive act, is the question I turn to in order to finish these explorations. It is clear that using performance enabled Bush to explore a number of different gendered positions and these complemented her textual strategies that arguably open up²⁶ and blur gendered space ('In Search of Peter Pan' here being an exemplary example). In many ways this structural re-ordering of time, space, body and positions are what enable new gendered embodiments to become a legitimate part of the cultural imaginary.

However, I think it is best to be cautious when considering the question of how subversive gender performance is. Is it really the most effective means of resistance to binary gender regimes? The critique I have in mind here is of Judith Butler's notion of subversive repetition, which emerged as a critical category in her 1990 text, *Gender Trouble*. Butler argued that heteronormativity and binary gender are maintained and affirmed in culture largely through the fact that they are constantly being repeated and thus they have, over time, become thoroughly normalised within the structures that we live in. Subversive repetition, on the other hand, is a means by which the canny subject can contort and disrupt the dominant forms of gendered behaviour. She asked in this text, '*What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?*'²⁷ Convincing as this idea sounds, our only power as subjects lies in our ability to subvert, not create. It is important now to question how subversive repetition limits the possibility of agency for the subject

²⁶ See the earlier section on 'Desire' in *The Kick Inside*.

²⁷ Judith Butler *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge, 1993. 42, emphasis in original.

and ask what alternatives are there for resistance that we can theorise which enable and affirm the creation of new gendered positions?

As Edward Davies observes, subversively repeating gender through performance or representation, does ‘predict[..] the possibility of creating new sexual identities although it remains to formulate how this might be done.’²⁸ He goes on to emphasise that the use of such a tactic ‘may indeed take a very long time to establish,’²⁹ what Bernice Hausman has called the ‘slow accrual’³⁰ of the effects of Butler’s subversive repetition. Given how lengthy a process of continually repeating one’s gender in a subversive way would be within this framework, it seems to me highly problematic to accept this as the revolutionary end of radical gender theory. The subject’s potential to have an effect upon the world around them is often what is glaringly omitted from this theorization, as Annabelle Willox summarises: ‘for Butler, we cannot escape the gender system; we can only subvert it through *visible* transgression.’³¹

That is why it is dangerous to automatically read *the ability* to play with one’s gender as radical or subversive, especially if parody and subversion signpost the total extent of a subject’s agency and opportunity to resist normative gender roles and identity categories - within Butler’s theatre we are still very much contained within the prison of gender.³² The structure of exclusion and segregation that subversive acts are graining against, still maintains a lot of power and this structure has far more capacity to ‘renew’ itself through autonomously operating repetitions such as: institutions, laws, narratives, ‘hetero-visibility’ and ‘normality’. Subversion can be a necessary and fun part of day to day life, but it can also be painful too, with the threats of violence and social exclusion being the penalty for those who wish to tread a different path to that of the norm. Therefore, it is really important to keep the possibility of creating new genders and sexualities open, not merely subverting old

²⁸ Davies, Edward ‘Finding Ourselves: Postmodern Identities and the Transgender Movement’ in Gillis, Howie and Munford eds. *Third Wave Feminism*, London: Palgrave, 2004. 114.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 115.

³¹ Annabelle Willox ‘Fucking Dykes: Phenomenology and Queer Carnal Knowledge(s)’ paper presented in February 2003 for the University College Dublin’s ‘The(e)ories: Advanced Seminars for Queer Research. See http://www.ucd.ie/werrc/events/ev_theories_speakers.htm last accessed 20/09/2006. Emphasis mine.

³² By the same token I fear I may be departing from reality. In many ways, playing/ parodying/ subverting dominant gender categories is radical but it is also very dangerous too in terms of living with the day to threat of violence

models. Subversion here can be compared to a process of making structures shudder by knocking against them in the hope that one day they will break.

Annabelle Willox has further critiqued Butler's idea by arguing that it implicitly relies on a binary structure for their intelligibility *and* workability. Referring to Butler's use of a butch identity to exemplify the visible crossing that subverts binary gender, she argues that 'Butler's theory relies on this crossing to exemplify the construction and performative nature of gender, yet her reliance upon crossing implicitly relies upon a binary structure that denies the autonomy of [other possible] identity[ies]'.³³ There is no room within Butler's framework for the creation of different gendered embodiments – the possibility of a butch identity being an autonomous identity in itself is actually an *impossibility*. Its existence functions merely to display the crossing and deviation from dominant gendered models of appropriate femininity.

This critique pointedly reveals how Butler's theory is limited because it is simply not generative and in fact denies creativity and difference. We could argue that it *re-enforces* rather than subverts the 'regulatory practice of identity itself.' Butler's admission that 'gender norms are finally phantasmatic, *impossible* to embody'.³⁴ further underlines this point – the route to revolution for Butler, is through the lack and loss of gender not through the multiplicity of possibilities that can be accessed by creating different gendered embodiments. Why is the loss of gender not an acceptable thing to desire? It seems that the only genders that we lose under the Butlerian frame are the models of patriarchal, heteronormative binary masculinity/ femininity – we do not lose all the possible other genders and sexualities by positing this state of gender loss, because their potential to be created in the first instance has been radically circumscribed. It seems far better to have the opportunity to have many choices than sink back into just the one, genderless body for, is that not the model of the liberal humanist subject anyway?

The important point that I wish to underline here is that no matter how much fun and tactically necessary 'performativity' can be; it does not place enough emphasis on the individual's power to be an agent and facilitate change. It places too much emphasis on a pre-determined structure that we can just about peel back the edges of, by subverting it. In its defence however, 'performativity' does allow for

³³ Annabelle Willox 'Fucking Dykes.'

³⁴ Judith Butler *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge, 1993. 141, emphasis mine.

movement *between* categories and this vehicle for thinking and acting is something that should not be abandoned completely.

However, embodying and creating new and different gendered embodiments enables distinct fleshed and subjective experiences to be included into the structure of cultural reality. This will also benefit people because it simply creates more space: psychical, bodily, desire and many more that are yet to be discovered. There is an emphasis on our capacity to imagine new positions to speak from; positions, which are not dragged back and mapped onto the original and hierarchical binary. This binary still exists even if Butler insists in her theory that gender is an imitation for which there is no original. The important thing is, if we choose to explore a path of difference, beyond or outside the prison of gender, then we don't have to *choose* between models of resistant thinking in the final instant of conclusion: 'performativity' can be just another form of difference, whose tools we can call upon when we need them most.

It should be clear from my exploration through some of the queerest aspects of Bush's musical career that she deploys *both* strategies in order to stretch the possibilities of expression accorded to a female singer, songwriter, and performer within a popular music market in the late 1970s. Certainly, her work can be understood as a form of subversive repetition because the transgressive gender performances on the album can be played repeatedly if we choose to do this. However, I would argue that the inhabitation and exploration of differently gendered speaking positions is not merely performative, as this model privileges only the visible crossing of gender as the 'successful' moment of resistance. As I have been at pains to elaborate, there is little, if any, attempt to do this – the crossing and destabilisation of gender occurs *within* the musical text. This crossing is engineered by creating spaces of doubt and speculation within the narrative arrangement that can be detected on 'In Search of Peter Pan' and through the musical and vocal transvestism of 'Wow,' 'Hammer Horror' and 'Coffee Homeground.' The re-arrangement of gendered space on these songs offers the listener the possibility to imagine and create yet-to-be defined subjectivities that move far beyond the

limitations of binary gender. Therefore Bush's 'crossing' on *Lionheart* is always embodied and structural and cannot be reduced to surface change.³⁵

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³⁵ Thank you to Josie Cousens and Sarah Gamble for their patience and scrutiny in the editing process of this article.