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Body Politics Between Sublimation and Subversion: Critical Perspectives On Twentieth-Century All Male Performances of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

The 1990s saw the publishing of a number of articles and books that, in general, considered the cross-dresser a symbolically and politically subversive figure.¹ They established him/her, among others, as the emblematic unstable representation of the symbolic order's condition of possibility (Garber), or endowed drag with a subversive power in the field of identity politics (Butler), which threatens to delegitimise the established gender system. As the living paradigm of hybridisation and instability at the root of supposedly stable gender orders, s/he served as a signifier that opened up a playful field of new subject positions and politically subversive pleasures, a paradigmatic *agent provocateur* and a hero of subversive gender politics. On the other hand, Laurence Senelick, in his analysis of the varieties of theatrical cross-dressing published in 2000, warns against an overestimation of the theatrical cross-dressed actor's capacity to reach out into the lived reality of the audience in such a way as to put into crisis the socially established matrix of gender relations: "Rather than confounding categories it [the cross-dressed actor] invents new ones, providing fresh matter for desire, and releases the spectator's imagination and libido by an ever-changing kaleidoscope of gender" (12). Senelick concludes that in this release the "transvestite in performance rarely displaces dichotomous systems of sex and gender" (12). On the contrary, its erotic lure depends all too often on the implicit affirmation of the dichotomous gender system, as Susanne Benedek and Adolphe Binder show in their critical study of basic patterns of cross-dressing in drag shows.

What follows is a short analysis of the construction of the cross-dressed body in four 20th century performances of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, as well as an attempt to link the various forms of theatrical cross-dressing to their respective cultural discourses. The aim, then, is to understand what kind of subject position they offer to their audiences as culturally and politically legitimate as well as individually rewarding.

Clifford Williams' *As You Like It* in 1967: Sublime Androgyny and a Politics of Purification

¹ Within this paper, I consider an element to be subversive of a hegemonic context whenever it either a) liberates a hitherto unperceived, repressed reality to the effect that this liberation threatens the personal or social hegemonic reality (and possibly forces it to acknowledge and incorporate the elements of this formerly repressed reality, which brings the subversive force to an end) or b) reveals the emotional and social price of such hegemonic repressions to such effect that the repressive hegemonic mechanism loses its purported "naturalness" and becomes historically specific, open to further criticism.

When the curtain lifted and the audience was presented with the court of Duke Frederick, what it saw in Clifford Williams' production with the National Theatre at the Old Vic in 1967 was an almost bare stage, whose back was marked by a transparent plexiglass wall. On stage a few geometrical forms, half pyramids and half conic cubes, gave the place a cleanliness that recalls the formal language of minimal art. Ralph Koltai's set design establishes pure and functional forms, clear lines for objects whose materiality does not expose marks of everyday usage but merely serves as material support for a formal language that suppresses the residues of human individuality and lived reality. Recalling minimal artist Sol Le Witt's dictum (qtd in Smith, Roberta 261) that ultimately only ideas can be works of art, the set design gives the production from the beginning a strong intellectual and idealist, almost anti-corporeal thrust. It is the first and already massive indication that, despite the provocative potential of his all-male project, director Clifford Williams was not interested in his all-male performance as a form of subversive body politics.

In an "Production Note" published in the production's program, he endorses "an all-male staging of *As You Like It* [that is] rooted organically in a belief about the nature of the play" (13), whose objective is, as Williams assumes, to "conjure up a time of magical release from material dominion which is as much part of the dreaming of our own age as of myth and legend". By his choice of words (organically, conjure up, magical) as well as the unilateral direction of this dream (release from material dominion), Williams infuses his approach with a transcendental essentialism as a kind of "organic" utopia for human desire. This slant towards love as an expression of angelic purity and not polymorphous sexuality is nowhere more obvious than in the concretisation of what he takes as the central message of the play. "The examination of the infinite beauty of Man in love – which lies at the very heart of *As You Like It* – takes place in an atmosphere of spiritual purity which transcends sensuality in the search for poetic sexuality. It is for this reason that I employ a male cast; so that we shall not - entranced by the surface reality - miss the interior truth." Williams constructs a relation between his concept and Jan Kott's famous essay "Bitter Arcadia" in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, by which he accepts the metaphysical interpretation of gender disguise as pointing towards androgyny, but suppresses its sensual aspects – the stimulation of erotic fantasies and physical desire – as mere surface elements. The expression "poetic sexuality", which brings together what Kott keeps apart as a productive, painful and teasing tension, suggests exactly such predominance of the poetic element over the sexual: the poetic qualifies the sexual, modifies it, constrains it. Williams' conclusive remark "Prosody before pelvises" is a rhetorically witty confession regarding the all-inclusive cultural value of language and links the production to the tradition of poetic drama. No wonder that Williams affirms that Kott's ideas are "kinky and stimulating [...] but they haven't much to do with the play" (*Observer*, 1 Oct 1967)

Hence, it comes to no surprise that the show does not play around with the multiple identities inherent in the cross-casting as well as the cross-dressing narrative. Philip French (*New Statesman*, 13 Oct 1967) even got the impression that "the production would not be significantly altered without

them [the cross-cast actors]”. The relative unimportance of the actor’s sex on stage is confirmed by *The Sunday Telegraph* (8 Oct 1967), whose critic notes that Pickup’s Rosalind “is the one most clinically drained of sensuality” and the critic of the *Press & Journal Aberdeen* (14 Oct 1967) remarks that “the comedy of Rosalind having to masquerade as Ganymede goes for nothing since Ronald Pickup in the part merely resumes his own off-stage sex”. Martin Esslin, writing for the *New York Times* on Rosalind’s and Celia’s lack of sensuality and sexual ambiguity, calls this a lack of a “Genet-like allure”. The link between sexual ambiguity and Genet that Esslin constructs loses its cryptic quality if we recall how Jan Kott interpreted the function of transvestism for Genet: “Transvestism [...] for Genet offered the supreme opportunity for subversion. To mimic the opposite sex (or race) constitutes the greatest profanation of all, because, as Artaud writes, on stage bodies and feelings become compounded. ‘To play love is to imitate love, but to mimic love is to demystify love, to mimic power is to demystify power, to mimic ritual is to demystify ritual.’” (Jan Kott, *Theatre Notebooks* 268, qtd in Senelick 10.)

Genet’s strategy towards subversion is based on a tactical use of the cross-cast actor’s body as a means for gender mimicry, which I understand, in the light of Kott’s quote, as an impulse to mock the hegemonic discourse on gender by ironically exposing its purported homogeneity as a fake. Genet does not want to voice his discontent through a utopian harmony in which the disparate status of its elements is overcome by a growing abstraction towards the level of the sublime. Williams, however, was overtly interested in the possibility of an all-male cast to achieve sublimity. He did not want to foreground the theatrical production of gender, nor was he interested in the fate of the body and its desires, in producing moments of polymorphous sexuality that clash with both bourgeois moral discipline and spiritual idealism. Milton Shulman’s impression that the performance’s credo was “a bas [sic] difference!” (*Evening Standard*, 4 Oct 1967) correctly defines its goal, but the strategy to abolish gender difference was elevation to the sublime. Williams’ overall theatrical intention was to produce poetic purity in the forest of Arden, to sublimate sexuality into poetic imagery and language.

But Shakespeare’s ambiguous treatment of poetic imagery points not only at a transformation of sexuality into poetic language, but also at the sexualisation of poetry – with clear physical innuendos in its attention to the actor’s body. Williams denies the audience members such fantasies on the body. For him, the play discusses “in a delightful but sober fashion the whole nature of love [...]. Ultimately it’s metaphysical, and by using men you give clarity to the dream-like quality” (*Observer*, 1 Oct 1967). One really wonders why Orlando should have had reason to cry: “I can live no longer on thinking” (V.2.50), for this metaphysical purity does rest on the absence of the female body and the absence of real physical passion. Frank Marcus (100) could write that if Williams’ Arden represents banishment, then it is “a banishment to a realm of aesthetic perfection.” Thus, the production simply modernizes the traditional notion of green Arden as a realm of release from the pressures of civilisation and daily hardship by embedding this dream of Arden in a contemporary poetic language – thus the modernist stage design.

Williams' concept is only feasible on the basis that the body and its desires is of neglectable value when it comes to love, as if physical contact could not transmit emotional and spiritual energy of the same value as words do. Yet, the love object in the narrative on stage is a human being, not God or any other expression of the Supreme Being. What is then the suggested love object for audience members? Certainly not a material one. Ultimately, the love object offered by this version of an all-male performance is very much the same that Guy Boas uses as a justification for his all-male productions at the Sloane School in 1955: the sublime beauty of poetic language and imagery, very much in the tradition of 19th century poetic drama, and the ideal soul that it conveys, but never an unstable body with polymorphous desires nor the enigmatic personality of the beloved. The audience is invited to direct its desires and fantasies onto this lofty realm, in an act that at the same time devalues the physical, mundane world of human action as it postpones forever the satisfaction of its spiritual lure.

Petrica Ionescu's *As You Like It* in 1976: Sexualised Masculinity and a Politics of Diversified Universality

In sharp contrast to Williams' social and aesthetic sensibility, Petrica Ionescu's 1976 production at the Schauspielhaus Bochum in Germany is marked by a strong anti-bourgeois impulse. If Williams followed Kott in his belief that Arden is Arcadia, a sphere where alienation is turned into sublime perfection, Ionescu seemingly preferred the other side of this medal: Arden as a "bitter Arcadia" where the human desire for sublime totality is not only terribly mocked, but turned inside out, so that the repressed visceral impulses can appear.

In an unpublished letter, Wilhelm Hortmann writes on Ionescu's production: "the all-male cast did not refer to unstable gender roles as it does nowadays; the possibilities of this play with androgyny were not exploited, not even suggested, probably not even recognised."² Actor Werner Eggenhofer, who played Celia in this production, remembers that he himself had missed oscillations between masculine and feminine identities and states that the production hardly tried to construct a tension between different layers of identity.³ Ernst Konarek, who played Touchstone, mentions that actors did not really bother about ambiguous or evasive gender impressions on stage. "The concept was rather to lie down, jump on, and shag".⁴ Eggenhofer surmises that Ionescu was not interested at all in the theatrical potential of the all-male cast to interrogate fixed gender roles, especially female ones. The expression which Ionescu repeated again and again to convey his idea was "Shakespeare – psychoterapeutique doc." We can infer from the actors' remembrance that the production's focus was

² "Die rein männliche Besetzung spielte damals noch nicht wie heute auf unsichere Geschlechterrollen an, die Möglichkeiten des Spiels mit der Androgynität wurden nicht ausgeschöpft, nicht einmal angedeutet, wahrscheinlich gar nicht erkannt." Unpublished letter to the author, 28 Oct 03.

³ Interview with the author, 12 Feb 04

⁴ Interview with the author, 12 May 04.

critical of bourgeois sexuality, the repression inscribed in it, and intended to present *As You Like It* as a play about sexual liberation. As we shall see by some decision concerning the stage design, this focus on sexuality, together with the all-male cast, led to a discussion of *male* sexuality only.

The production started conventionally with a court ruled by physical strength and cruelty. However, Ionescu denies a sharp contrast between court and Arden. The Duke's party in Arden was depicted as a bunch of idiots, thinking more about debauchery than keeping up good manners. If the court is marked by sadistic pleasures, Arden maintains the obsession with power positions in the erotic sphere. For the erotic encounters of the male-female couples from lower social rank, those that involved inhabitants of the forest were marked by eruptive sexual activity with little time for emotional exchange. These scenes were not only infused with a "lack of love and tenderness",⁵ but also mirrored in its swift "jump-on-and-shag" attitude (Konarek) a pornographic sexuality shot through with impulses of domination and subordination. In the performance, the female figures never took on the active "upper" position, so that the sexual encounters in Arden mirrored the most conventionalised sexuality within bourgeois society. Hence, the overall impression suggested by the production was that the play deals not with a dichotomy between civilisation and nature, but with a run-down, male civilisation whose rules are all-pervasive and all-encompassing. Court and Arden are a world built of isolated, instinctive egos, out of touch and unable to communicate with one another.

In the final wedding scene, all actors undressed almost completely. With nothing but a codpiece on their loins, they danced with their respective partners to the music of a Viennese waltz entitled "It must be part of heaven".⁶ This marks the marriage scene as a complete change of acting style, atmosphere and identity concepts on stage. It characterises not only human identity as rejuvenated, but – given the nudity of the actors as a physical stepping out of (female) character – it also suggests that the production's interest was in masculinity and in showing the trajectory of a homosocial (and possibly homosexual) male world: initially and up to the final wedding scene, marked by cruel power relations that uphold it and express the repressed inner truth of bourgeois society; and finally, a sexually liberated and emotionally healed world of male relations.

In this transformation, female energy did play a decisive, yet limited role. During the Arden scenes, Ionescu had a woman brought on stage, imprisoned in a cage. This beast-of-prey-like woman left the cage in the wedding scene to perform the part of god Hymen. Against bourgeois one-sided masculinity, Ionescu seemed to have conceived what might be called a liberated masculinity, through the fusion of masculine and feminine impulses, but deferred its realisation to the final wedding. Nature in Arden was no feminine realm endowed with healing powers, no "green world". Its energy works as to produce polymorphous masculinity. As such, masculinity becomes all-inclusive, once more subsumes female qualities to affirm its totality and renders women invisible on stage. The treatment of

⁵ Konarek, Interview, 12 May 04.

⁶ "Es muß ein Stück vom Himmel sein" by Josef Strauss, op.263.

the strategic wedding scenes reveals how the actors' naked physical body is the ultimate reality on stage, not one reality among others that are more histrionically or sartorially produced.

The focus on a sexually liberated masculinity is finally emphasized through a crucial interaction with the audience, based on a verbal pun. While the now released "cage woman" was delivering Hymen's speech, Rosalind came up from under the stage on a small hydraulic platform, stark naked. Actor Knut Koch put both his forearms in front of himself to cover his body; one to cover his breast, the other to cover his genitalia. With the line "*Euch übergeb' ich mich, denn ich bin Euer*" (V.4.115-116),⁷ Knut Koch lifted both forearms, one after the other, and showed the audience and Orlando his naked male body. According to Konarek and Eggenhofer, there he stood down stage, arms wide open – like a mixture between call-boy and Jesus. Given the focus on the link between male sexuality and dominance throughout *Arden*, this picture represents a kind of masculinity that assumes a devoted attitude, which may even play with associations on sexual submission, since the words clearly acknowledge the addressed audience as being now in charge. It is a poignant invitation to the (male) audience to accept its sexuality as infused with female and homosexual desires, as well as power impulses.

Ionescu's intention clearly was to bring the repressed erotic contents of the bourgeois psyche on stage and to break with its hegemonic cultural context. Yet, his supposedly "therapeutic" provocation was flatly rejected, or not perceived as a provocation at all, namely by those who were already converted. The initial stage image, in which Touchstone showed his bare posterior to the audience waiting for the show, was received by the majority of the audience as a mere insult. This reaction is quite understandable, but if we rethink the beginning with the epilogue in mind, it is clear that Konarek's posterior could be read also as an invitation. Consequently, the gay audience loved it as a splendid joke.⁸ Ionescu's idea of Shakespeare as a "psychotherapeutic doc" was a transgressive one, if compared to the moral standards of his time. Yet, the majority of his audience was not willing to undergo such therapy, and if he did not succeed in luring it into an identification with his cross-dressed figures on stage, then may be because his strategy was too blunt. Since he did not fuse male and female gender identities on stage, he was unable to queer his figures on stage and offer a polymorphous gender identity to heterosexual members of both sexes in the audience. It remains a mystery what kind of satisfaction heterosexual and female spectators could find in this all-male universe whose love object was ultimately always a man.

Katharina Thalbach's *As You Like It*: Burlesque Androgyny and a Politics of Problematic Erotic Escapism

⁷ "*To you I give myself, for I am yours*". Ionescu used the romantic translation by Schlegel as to give his provocation of the bourgeois Shakespeare tradition a stronger impetus. The German line is an almost literate translation of Shakespeare's blank verse, emulating the five-foot structure.

⁸ Konarek, 12.05.04.

The majority of critics detected in Katharina Thalbach's 1993 production of *As You Like It* at the Schiller Theater Berlin a lack of interest in psychological characterisation. Although some deplored this as a loss, most perceived in this non-psychological approach a burlesque aesthetics concerning plot and characters as the main aesthetic quality of the production. Within this theatrical framework, cross-dressing was just one element among others to dissolve rigid identities and present the Forest of Arden as a playground where all kind of games can be carried out. The politically problematic aspect of this concept is laid open by consequent doubling of all roles apart from Rosalind, Orlando and Celia. Hence, the performance not only problematized the dissolution the boundaries of gendered identities, but through the doubling of characters also the boundaries between civilised court and the court in nature, between the social and magic reality in the play's narrative. Moreover, the doubling worked as to establish the performance as an artistic world in its own right, which did not pretend to imitate any outside social reality.

According to the show's dramaturg Franziska Koetz, what interested Thalbach in this aesthetics was to find out what emotional possibilities, especially in its darker aspects, "could be transported through such a burlesque theatre. The burlesque treats emotions in a special way, and [the production] wanted to follow this track."⁹ In other words, we can surmise that the theatrical license is meant to test opportunities and limitations of individuals free of emotional and socio-political restraints.

If the burlesque brought into play a rather coarse theatrical style, the poetic impact of the stage succeeded for some critics in counter-balancing it, producing indeed a kind of aesthetic vibrancy in style. But even if set design and lighting managed to cite a romantic poetic quality not only as a feature of the play but also of human longing,¹⁰ the burlesque stage business and acting styles backgrounded these more reflective elements of the production, establishing a dynamics that exposes the human longing for a free play of surface signifiers. Peter Lohmeyer's impersonation of Phoebe is a good example of such cross-cast performances, and their limitations in relation to a supposed effect such as theatrical vibrancy (despite obvious entertaining qualities). Phoebe was visually presented with the help of costume and hair designer as a fiery gypsy. Koetz recalls with hindsight that Peter Lohmeyer had serious difficulties to perform a woman on stage. The man was always very present, and in his attempts to render a convincing woman, he often ran the danger of becoming too much of a man in drag. To avoid the impression of drag, Thalbach suggested to Lohmeyer to play consciously the tendency to fall back into male attitudes, for instance lowering his voice more than usual, assuming male body postures, ostentatiously exposing the change of gender. Ingeborg Pietzsch judges that Lohmeyer is so convincing in this production, "*weil [er] immer wieder durch Stimme und Haltung*

⁹ Interview with the author, 11.02.04

¹⁰ For in what else but this congruence could a notion of *artistic* success consist?

bewußt den femininen Gestus unterläuft.”¹¹ The subversive effect was heightened by Phoebe’s gypsy femininity, which Lohmeyer played as naturalistic as possible when in the female manner.¹² For Koetz, the resulting character was a woman who had little talent for behaving like a woman, but never a transvestite, and Lohmeyer presented his own difficulty as a difficulty of the character in order to produce a comic effect, in which both layers of gender identity were clearly separated.

In this character Thalbach clearly did not try to advance a tension between a humanist notion of character (Phoebe as a character in the tradition of psychological realism) and a late modern one (Phoebe as a mere theatrical figure with no psychological core). The variety of surfaces does not construct a whatever elusive profundity. Or in other words, no attempt is made to present both sides as part of a strained or stretched unity. They are allowed to exist side by side, which makes up for the burlesque effect. This theatrical figure knows no pain about her/his gender confusion. S/he is theatrically effective, because the theatrical confusion calls up the remnants of modern gender expectations in the audience, but in her/his play with surface structures, the figure advances a more late modern understanding of theatrical character. The absence of pain and suffering is exactly what makes the character effective as a proxy for those audience members, who want to forget about the social and emotional restrictions of their own lived reality, but less so for audience members who expect a less utopian, and more socially transgressive construction of gender and identity. We can see in Lohmeyer’s Phoebe how the burlesque acting tends to exclude audience empathy with the characters as social beings, which in turn tends to make the theatrical figures (and *pars pro toto* the production) politically less effective, since a relation between on stage and off stage worlds is more difficult to establish.

In line with this lack of psychological interest, dramaturg Franziska Koetz emphasises the production’s disinterest in focusing explicitly on questions of sex, gender, and object choice. In general, Koetz states that the “the main aphrodisiacum in this production was language. There were relatively little moments of physical contact. Usually it was language that functioned as a means of seduction, lubrication, contact, which was also an effect of the translation – as if the words had fingers.” Indeed, Thomas Brasch’s translation turned emotions into sparkling metaphors, and the expression of emotions took on an artificial, highly aestheticised life of its own. Hence, both the burlesque and the verbally stylised erotics denied an experience of profound, “authentic” emotionality. What the production offers is a stylized artificiality, a sensational thrill, and in this form it contains a corrosive self-questioning. The production team was too acutely aware of the impossibility to run

¹¹ “...because he again and again subverts the feminine gestus through voice and posture.”

¹² All critics concurred that the production successfully avoided drag aesthetics, and that the audience followed Thalbach’s proposal to take the male actors, whenever necessary, as genuinely female characters. Bernd Lubowski goes even so far as to state that there was no moment of ambiguity. This is clearly contradicted by other critics, but if we take his ambiguity as relating to sexual connotations, he is certainly right. As Cheek by Jowl’s production, despite the metatheatrical androgyny, Thalbach’s production was a relatively sexless affair. Koetz explicitly emphasised how little physical contact existed on stage between the actors. The seductive force did not lie in the bodies, but the language. See also 4.2.4.

away from the court, from civilization, as to treat the art of Arden as a pleasure free of power structures, as a realm of deep, authentic emotionality. Ultimately, the dilemmas in this production are not produced by gender confusion and thwarted sexual object choice, but by the fact that the erotic escape into Arden reproduces the power situations it wants to overcome. And director Katharina Thalbach's apparent intention to problematise the liberating promise entailed in this aesthetic Arden can be read as an indirect problematisation of her theatrical art and the audience's reception of it.

There is one element of stage business that could have led critics to understand this auto-critical impulse in the production: the use of Katharina Thalbach's own voice off-stage. Thalbach's voice can be heard through the speakers the first time in English, when Rosalind asks Orlando what time it is. And Thalbach appears again, in the role of Hymen, confirming the suspicion that her off-stage voice was more than a mere entertaining joke. In the opening night, she actually crawled on stage from under Rosalind's dress, but in the other performances, her voice could be heard once more from loud-speakers off-stage. These two moments allow to understand that the freedom of the forest was not only conceived as a temporary release from the painful constraints and regulations of lived social reality, but what's more, this realm of compensatory pleasures was supervised by the same authoritative, abstract and god-like power that held society together and controlled its regulations. Escapist theatre is presented as little more than a kind of *officially* licenced amusement park.

The production used cross-dressing and the world of Arden to simultaneously expose and question the power of theatrical art as a kind of mass entertainment. Thalbach offered a piece of excellent entertainment, only to problematise its status by making visible the oppressive political frame. Most critics failed to notice this frame. Yet, through it Thalbach made it clear that to her erotic games are no feasible way to individual, and much less to social liberation.

Declan Donnellan's *As You Like It*: Performative Androgyny and a Politics of Theatrical Mobility

Director Declan Donnellan and his group Cheek by Jowl came up with an all-male version of *As You Like It* that is characterised by a formal stability that looks for interpretative and emotional openness. In an interview with Ralph Berry, Donnellan responds in the affirmative to Berry's question if he sees "the function of theatre as some kind of social therapy for the audience" (*On Directing*, 206), but Donnellan does locate this therapeutic social service in theatre's capacities to entertain the audience in such a way that it imaginatively expands the spectators' sensibilities into hitherto unaccepted emotional possibilities: "I like to think that the only way that theatre makes people better, the only social service it does, is to make people bigger. It expands their imaginations, even if that means showing people what it's like to kill babies" (206). Such expansion is equal to undermining the streamlining function and pressures of fixed belief systems and rigid identities. In his book *The Actor*

and the Target, he contends on the narcissist function of everyday frames: “The identity has no intentions of letting mere reality contradict its theories.” (242). If everyday imagination presents a kind of sentimental anaesthetics that covers painful, ambivalent reality by “fixing the flux and ambivalence of life in the certainty of stillness” (107), then works of art can make us “see, however briefly, a more real world, where joy and pain are felt for what they are” (238). In the wake of this more real, less censored and controlled world, essential notions of character and personality get dissolved. “When we try to capture the essence of someone we are being sentimental. Sentimentality is the refusal to accept ambivalence. Certainty is sentimental. [...] Sentimentality is terrifying” (107). That’s why he makes use of a strong metatheatrical element in the production, due to its de-stabilising possibilities.

If the theatricality of the production clearly undermines from the beginning any concept of identity as the expression of essentialist characteristics, it also avoids the impression that non-essentialist identity could then be understood as constructed out of individual choices alone. Donnellan uses scene I.1 and its non-illusionist theatrical frame to draw attention to the fact that someone/something defines the script of the performance. An instance or norm regulates the characters’ entrances and exits.

In this vein, the production’s most obvious intervention into the received interpretation of the Shakespearean text opens a kind of programmatic prelude to the action. The much commented on opening scene can stand as emblematic for the theatrical frame of the production. All actors dressed alike in white shirt and black trousers enter the stage, walk around in a circle while the actor later to play Jaques recites the first two lines of his famous soliloquy: “All the world’s a stage/ And men and women merely players” (II.7.139-140). At the mentioning of “men” and “women”, the male actors form two groups, one being the male characters, the other the two female ones, Rosalind and Celia. When Jaques speaks the next line “They have their exits”, the actor to perform Adam puts on a butler’s hat and jacket, and with “and their entrances” Orlando steps forward. A few minutes later, the audience will see Oliver putting on the jacket among the other actors and approach Orlando.

By focusing on indexical signs to identify the characters on stage, the production sets out to produce them first as types, or in other words, it self-consciously employs stereotypes to attribute a temporary identity to them. Such theatricalisation of identity reveals the latter as the fulfilment of social conventions. This specific meta-theatrical framing of gender allows a) to acknowledge that they exist in relation to social expectations and exercise a formative influence on the characters’ self-presentation, and b) to displace the regulations of these performances by countering them with theatrical behaviour that distances the character from the purported fixity of social conventions. The actors are actually mimicking gender and expose it as a relatively fixed sign, open to new configurations. What’s more, the performance creates a gap between social conventions and human emotionality that exceeds social gender definitions.

This can be experienced in the epilogue, which is marked as a sudden change on the level of fiction. The couples are still engaged in the final dance, when the music suddenly stops and all stand as they are, with Orlando holding Rosalind embraced down stage left. Actor Adrian Lester then lets go of Orlando's arm, steps forward and delivers the final lines in a completely undramatic, natural style. Thus, he manages to convey at least part of the ambiguous meanings of the lines to his audience, judging by the audience's laughter when he charges women to like as much of the play as pleases them. The naturalness of his voice and the smooth, quick change between marriage rites and epilogue ensure that the atmosphere of the dance is still there – and hence a positive energy for Rosalind's conjuring. Before starting with the lines "if I were a woman", Lester takes off his earrings and hair ribbon, which reveals his short cut hair and his ears. The figure on stage is clearly a man, which comes not as a shock, but as a kind of *déjà vu*, as if to state that a) theatrical fiction now comes to an end, and b) the sex and gender of the actor (or character) is or should be ultimately unimportant. By framing the gender of the actor to such an effect, the production finally uses the all-male casting and the concomitant gender vibrancy for a surprising defence of a common *human* sphere against the intrusion of politically produced gender categories. So, in the end, the real transgression proposed by Donnellan's all-male production is to remain conscious of socio-political frames, but also to maintain open a sensitivity for a realm where socio-political markers matter less than our common emotional human nature. Donnellan's political usage of the erotic and amorous capacities in staging the marriage with an all-male cast insists on the power of a human sphere that exceeds political inscription. The transgression of socially fixed gender opposites leads to a need to dislocate social power positions. That's why Orlando hands over the medal to Rosalind. They both overcome the necessity to construct fixed identity along lines of gender and class, and in doing so they construct an "expanded" sensitivity that all human beings share a common frailty, emotionality, and desire for free play that need to get defended against and mediated with the necessities of social reality.

Conclusion

In Ionescu's production, the social relevance of this liberated masculinity remains vague, and polymorphous sexual virility comes to represent a non-political utopia. It has to do so, in order virtually to fulfil a dream of plenitude, as do Williams' sublime androgyny and Thalbach's world of semantic free play. Ionescu's production shares with Williams' an almost ingenuous belief in the healing truth of such utopia, whereas Thalbach's approach is too

experienced not to understand and incorporate the vanity of such belief. In contrast to such attitudes, Donnellan's production does not envisage a polymorphous gender utopia as a basis for human solidarity, but rather as the side effect of a political practice towards social equality. But it is the pleasures found in a gendered interaction beyond fixed social significations that serve as a decoy for the spectators not only to embark on these imaginative games, but also to initiate viable political actions towards a social situation in which human connectedness, instead of a defined common ground, cherishes the existence of differences beyond fixed hierarchies. Donnellan expresses it in his interview with Berry: "The central moment of theatre is when the audience's imagination and the actor's imagination are perfectly joined, and something is born between them. It's not like a pornographic vaudeville in which something unobtainable is displayed" (202).

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