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Dorothy Arzner's trousers

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Who was Dorothy Arzner? The easy answer to the question is that Dorothy Arzner was the only woman director to survive in the U.S. motion picture industry during the studio system's Golden Era. Preceded in the silent film era by F. W. Murnau, Lois Weber and Alice Guy Blaché and followed in the 1950s by Ida Lupino, she worked as the only woman director in this period, and she worked steadily and productively, as evidenced by her output — the twenty films released between 1927 and 1953. But the "who" question, although important for feminists, recedes in significance in comparison with the "what" question that matters so much more: "What *was* she?" — an impossible determination, especially in relation to her "impossible identity," a trouble of designation compounded further by her passage and historical "change." [1] [\[open notes in new window\]](#) If the relationship between lesbian and gay identity stands in dispute in the present, it remains for the future, if not unresolvable both in and for the past. For feminist film theory, however, the question of Dorothy Arzner *was* and how to name it may be moot since feminists have already claimed her as *the* most important "lesbian" director in U.S. film history. The question then becomes as much one of what Dorothy Arzner *is* for feminist film theory in the contemporary period.

For the last fifteen years, feminists have made Dorothy Arzner into a kind of patron saint of theory, during which time her work has provided the subject matter for a number of important articles as well as a monograph published by the British Film Institute. Her position as an honorary deconstructionist becomes confirmed by her presence on the cover of one of the most distinguished feminist film theory collections. [2] Yet something remains missing. With the exception of an important early talk by Claudia Gorbman, feminists whispered the word but never really spoke to Arzner's lesbianism. [3]

That is, feminists whispered the word until Judith Mayne's recent book broke the fifteen years of silence. Confirming the deepness of this silence, Mayne

further asserts that throughout this hushed period, feminist film theory produced a strangely split discourse resulting in two "Dorothy Arzners": the "textual Arzner" and the highly visible image of Dorothy Arzner.[4] Quite rightly points out the intent focus on the "textual Arzner," recalling the theoretical significance of the moment in *DANCE, GIRL, DANCE* (1940) when Judy (Maureen O'Hara) turns on her male audience, "returning the gaze." One emphasizes enough the importance of Claire Johnston's discovery of the screen reversal in the first decade of feminist film theory.[5]

Although *Cahiers du Cinéma's* theorization of the "Series E film" demonstrates how gaps and formal disruptions occurred widely in classical Hollywood narratives, the possibility of totally undermining the patriarchal text seems strategically wrong for feminist film theory, an emerging criticism that had already staked a great deal on establishing how patriarchal cinema functioned in an exclusionary way.[6] Looking back, one recalls how the discipline of feminist film theory often worked as a constraint that produced more or less little frustration. And yet, following the late 1980s when, in the heyday of celebratory criticism, feminist critics suddenly read many Hollywood texts as progressive, it began to seem that *Cahiers* "Series E theory" and not classical narrative itself that might be subverted from within. Today one is tempted to feel some nostalgia for the time when a critic rarely found such a moment as Johnston did in Arzner's *DANCE, GIRL, DANCE*. The theory of patriarchal cinema's thorough ideological saturation held at bay another potential problematic tendency — the tendency to automatically ascribe transgressiveness to films and tapes when made by women.

Serious work on the "textual Arzner," whether it had to do with the discourse of monogamy or the suppression of the feminine in *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* (1932) helped to establish critical credentials for feminist film theory.[7] Mayne tells us about two Arzners: the "textual Arzner," an always deflected representation of desire, and the photographic image of Dorothy Arzner, an image that hinted at the desire unrepresented in the film criticism. Mayne points out how prominent images of Dorothy Arzner wearing trousers and tailored suit jackets illustrated early scholarship, so that these images bore the burden of articulating the unspeakable. The significance of the photographic image, silent but eloquent evidence cannot be emphasized enough, and not only in the illustrations for scholarly discussions of Arzner's work. For years, an "8x10" glossy of Arzner with Joan Crawford on the set of *THE BRIDE WORE RED* hung on the wall of my office — a kind of feminist theory "pin-up."

I want to explore two avenues Mayne leaves open—first, to further her argument on how Arzner's image functioned; second, to question the issue of Arzner's authorship by examining how this director worked with gay male costume designers. First, I want to reiterate Mayne's point about the image's inimitable attractiveness. Arzner's image offers many delights — the expensive tailoring details on her suits, her patterned ties, cufflinks, white shirts, and jodhpurs.

with boots, one leg coolly crossed over the other. More than one production features Dorothy in profile, sighting an actress, looking directly into the camera, the other from under her thick unplucked brows. In these photographs, the desire is made exceedingly alluring and chic.

That the chic butch Arzner (wielding the power of a male director and the adoration of glamorous actresses) represents only a fantasy of lesbianism doesn't matter. And to say that the image offers food for reverie is not to diminish the political importance of the way Arzner's image has stood for lesbianism, exactly the spot where that desire has been repressed. On the contrary, this is to acknowledge the tremendous imaginative power of lesbianism, a reclamation, that real fantasy possession of the icons of motion pictures. It is also to acknowledge that if we wish to chart the coordinates of desire intersecting Arzner's image, we need to look at a variety of contradictory crossings. The image, after all, remains indifferent to the sort of fascination it attracts. Although persons may have political positions in regard to fantasy material, fantasy itself doesn't much care what or who inspires it.[9]

Until very recently, the only way to locate the range of identity crossings which I refer to would have been along Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum," an ingenious gesture of inclusion that allowed a "maybe, maybe not" position for sexual love between women.[10] Since the 1980 appearance of Rich's essay, in developing this concept, it has stood as the reigning lesbian feminist paradigm in academic circles. But its influence has not gone without challenge. I wonder if "lesbian continuum" can adequately express the complexity of identities formed around sexuality. And the concept has come under increasing attack for the way it has smoothed out the conflict between lesbianism and sexuality and political (only) lesbianism.

At this time in history, academic feminism may look less and less toward the woman's movement (and its cultural feminism) and more toward the lesbian and gay movement as a source for an evolving theory of gender, identity, and sexuality. And I do mean "source," for as academic feminists have become more involved with university, politics and less involved with community struggles, they have looked to the people's movements to which they no longer belong for their "supply" of new concepts upon which to base theories. Most recent work in lesbian and gay studies has given academic feminism a considerably fuller theorization of "lesbian," although it remains to be seen whether woman's movement lesbians will see themselves at all in the category. What I am after in my attempt to comprehend the attractions to Arzner's image is a fluid, fluctuating category that acknowledges the uncertainty and the inadvisability of assigning identities based on sexual practice. Here I take my cue from Judith Butler's understanding of "lesbian" and "gay" as "sites of necessary trouble," whose categorical instability offers less an occasion for concern than an occasion for pleasure (a pleasure of duplicity as well as of uncertainty) (Butler, 1990). The disputedness of the category should allow room for the cautious and to

well as the unequivocal embrace of lesbianism. I especially would like to "trouble" definition to allow (although the category may not finally extend far) for a position of *vicarious transgression*.

Vicarious transgression refers to the kind of exhilaration produced by the knowledge of how much "trouble" gay/ lesbian desire produces for heterosexuality. It points to identification with the idea of disruption, not necessarily participation in that disruption. This is a knowing position, as I have said, and what is known is that the dividing line between heterosexuality and homosexuality remains a disputable boundary, the two identities so close that they can and do touch.[11] One would expect that the safe territory stands as nothing more than an interloper or a liberal romanticizer of the margins. This may be the case, but I am also wanting to borrow something from Alex Doty's concept of *queer positioning*, a vantage point on culture which one can step into and out of, a possibility that the text offers which a willing viewer can take up.[12] But *queer positioning* goes beyond its queasier cousin, *transgression*. As I understand *queer positioning*, it is also a direct challenge to the textual subject positioning that in 1970s film theory was said to "position" the viewer as (heterosexually) gendered. Here, instead, the viewer may be "produced" as a homosexual. Crucially, *queer positioning* implies that some proposition of some kind has been made and accepted. I would want to see some sense of this "trying out" of a sexual identity position. It's the *vicarious* aspect of an essentially transgressive fantasy.

My attempt to define this place of *vicarious transgression* is motivated by my interest in explaining the common situation of feminist critics who, although fascinated by her image, did not deal directly with Dorothy Arzner and lesbianism in the 1970s.[13] And I include in the category unequivocal feminist not-lesbians, straight, in theory-only lesbians, as well as once-future lesbians. I make no apologies for this attitude, which characterized many feminists in the first fifteen years of Arzner scholarship. Undeniedly, vicarious transgressors are fence-sitters.

While I am on the subject, I wish to emphasize that although Arzner's photographic image may invite a conventional auteur approach, that is not the interest Judith Mayne also dismisses auteurism for its contemporary inapplicability, particularly given the significance of the poststructuralist critique of the position vis-a-vis the text (*Lesbian Looks*, 115). And the biographical approach has other problems, some of which can be illustrated by the influential interview with Arzner conducted by Karen Kay and Gerald Peary in 1973, six years after her death in 1979.[14] This interview, along with revivals of her work, help to restore Arzner to her place in film history. At the time, *DANCE, GIRL, DANCE* (1940) *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* (1933), and *THE WILD PARTY* (1929) had been centerpieces in the first of the First Annual Women's Film Festivals in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco.

The Kay and Peary interview does not significantly differ in its format from other interviews with motion picture pioneers that have filled the page journals. But although it is not constructed differently, feminist film critics read it differently — more closely and over and over. This close reading has been crucial to the process of writing a lesbian feminist film theory, although when the interview first appeared, it provoked only limited questions. The question most often asked ("Was Dorothy Arzner at least a woman-identified woman?") actually allowed an evasion of the issue of lesbianism. In retrospect, the 1970 New York Radical Lesbians formulation of a "woman-identified woman" seems somewhat quaint.[15] Over time, this strategic move to expand the definition of lesbian to include women who were lesbian in politics only came to have fulfilled the prophecy about that very move. Yes, the concept was embraced by Jane Addams, Willa Cather, and Dorothy Arzner. It also postponed dealing with the importance of lesbian sexuality, and it backed off from acknowledging the real dangers of living as an "out" homosexual. The "woman-identified woman" hypothesis also problematically set up a too literal expectation, which Arzner's own commentary on her work could not sustain. This expectation conspired with an unexamined auteurism to produce the "problem" of Dorothy Arzner. Much was made, for instance, of the fact that when questioned about CHRISTOPHER STRONG, (the Katherine Hepburn vehicle about the aviatrix based on the life of the British flyer Amy Lowson), Arzner said that she was more interested in the male character, Sir Christopher Strong. It is this character, a married man, by whom the heroine becomes pregnant. Honorably, to avoid the risk of dividing his family, she commits suicide in a successful shot at breaking the altitude record.

In the interview, Arzner denies that she had any particular interest in creating the important woman characters (Billie Burke's wife and Hepburn's daughter).

"...I was more interested in Christopher Strong, played by Cohn Cochran, than in any of the women characters. He was a man 'on the cross' who loved his wife, and he fell in love with the aviatrix. He was on the cross. I was really more sympathetic with him, but no one seemed to pick up on that. Of course, not too many women are sympathetic about the torture the situation might give to a man of upright character." (Kay and Peary, 163).

One can read this remark in any number of interesting ways, the most interesting of which may be to repudiate the kind of automatic auteurism Arzner could attract. Also, from a contemporary point of view, we have arrived at a point in Left politics where we know that transgression in one arena does not necessarily mean transgression in another[16]. Or, as Diana Fuss asks the question, "And does inhabiting the outside...guarantee radicality?" (Fuss, 1991, 107).

Clearly, the burden of reading Dorothy Arzner's work in a radical way lies with the critic and not with the historical person. What this means is that as critics write

(and do) read this group of films "in the name of Dorothy Arzner." By "in the name of," I mean something slightly different from the kind of insinuation implied in Judith Mayne's term "female signature." (*Women at the Key*) I do want to retain some notion of the female author as having left some mark on the text (for political purposes at least), yet locating that something always requires an act of faith that is politically problematic in other ways.[17] Reading "in the name of," or reading "for Arzner," I mean more of a performative critical meaning as an homage to Dorothy Arzner and all that she has stood for in film history. And I would extend the same gesture to those whose work needs credit and admiration.

Lesbian and gay theories of aesthetics (whether of high art or low camp) historically started with the paradigm of the discrepancy of homosexual relation to heterosexual society. In the classic theorizations of camp, for instance, gay sensibility is derived from the need to constantly assemble and disassemble — to perform a self. Richard Dyer has recently given this theorization a new angle in his argument that, in one sense, being gay and authorship — both are performances. ("All authorship and sexual identities are performances, done with greater or less facility.") [18] Some are successful; some are not. Dyer achieves the simultaneous retrieval and dismissal of authorship with a coy twist — to believe in authorship is to believe in fairies. Retaining the social construction of both, while entertaining the possibility for the course of one fleeting article, he subtly shows us the political significance of believing (all the while we know they aren't really real but "only" magical). And so I only too happily find an argument I can borrow that allows me to pretend Arzner is an author without the danger of lapsing into auteurist or politically retrograde idealism.

What would a reading "for Arzner" look like? First of all, I'm not arguing for different readings, because my dissatisfaction is not with feminist readings of female auteurs but rather with the stubborn intrusion of causality which sets up any kind of author/text relation. A reading of *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* "for Arzner," might first of all look at the film in the interests of transgression, considering, for instance, the way the characters undermine conventional morality. *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* then gives us a situation in which the upstanding of patriarchs admits the contradiction which conventional morality usually cannot accommodate: It is possible to love two people (or more) at the same time.

The *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* family plight seemingly remains played out within the generic laws of melodrama. But what do we make of the fact that the film finally refuses to bear out the moral pattern of the times (always the test case of melodrama)?[19] No one is judged, no lessons are taught, no character is punished for a task. The sacrifice of the heroine avoids a soppy, artificial, restorationist moral order. Because Cynthia Darrington removes herself from the world, she never becomes conservative like Christopher Strong, who is given the l

"Marriage and children make almost any woman old-fashioned and int

The importance of locating the Arzner text in relation to melodrama was lost on film theorists, but they will want to know how a reading "for Arzner" might be different from the many analyses of 50s melodrama in terms of Douglas Sides subversive aesthetics. Traditionally, Sirkian auteur critics read the director's films as using an excessive cinematic style to "compress the narrative, a device which illustrates the moral demise of the U.S. middle class family.[20] A somewhat similar critical position has been attributed to lesbian and gay existence (not to mention cultural production). What does lesbian and gay identities (if anything does), according to Judith Butler, do? People live them as "running commentaries" on the heterosexual claim to naturalness. As such, they work parodically off the heterosexual assumption (Butler, 23).

What we would finally want to argue "for Arzner," however, must go beyond what critics have considered subversive in a Sirkian sense, that is, "for" an irreconcilable German Leftist point of view on the United States in the 1950s. Where Sirkian point of view may start from a "displacement" in terms of bourgeois United States, Arzner's vantage offers a "displacement" in relation to heterosexual society, producing a more troublesome and inexcusable disjunction.[21] From this peculiar (queerly positioned) point of view, we can interpret CHRISTOPHER STRONG as demonstrating how heterosexual monogamy cripples the imagination and curbs the appetite for living a life of passion, how Cynthia's heroic death stands at once for a bold termination of patriarchy and an acknowledgement that heterosexuality kills.[22]

ARZNER AND HER COSTUME DESIGNERS

While I see the advantages of considering the film text as the director's performance (especially the lesbian or gay author), the notion has as much more usefulness when applied to the motion picture costume designer. Significantly, a performance theory of cultural production also allows us to consider collective work, which is the real mode of U.S. motion picture production in this period (as opposed to single authorship, the imaginative mode). So I want to look at the performances of Arzner and her designers working toward a performance theory of collaboration.

One point needs clearing up, however, before I proceed any further with this argument: it could be seen as a conflict of discourse: the use of a gay male aesthetic of camp within a lesbian-directed film. Although it is well established that the male relation to camp has a long history, descending from the tradition of the dandy, camp does not clearly have a positive relation to lesbianism. It is only in the last few years that a lesbian relation to camp is emergent in academic circles, especially following Judith Butler's work which takes drag as one of its central parameters. A second look may discover camp there all along, certainly evidenced in the

lesbian community's enthusiastic reception of Jan Oxenberg's COME OUT UNNATURAL ACTS.[23] Probably the best move here (in the interests of encouraging the development of a lesbian theory of camp) is to make a distinction between the bad politics and the good politics of camp. In this instance, the problem with camp is its refusal to renounce the straight world on which it has developed a parasitical dependence (Ross, 161). Camp is heterosexual romance with its out-dated chivalry as well as consumer culture and acquisition with all of its class aspirations. But also, gay male camp is based upon the acquisition of traditional "feminine" tendencies — "emotionality," "fussiness," and "narcissism," tendencies that lesbians have abandoned and discarded. Yet herein lie the possibilities of good camp. Camp knows and questions how "femininity" and "masculinity" can be detached from gender so that one gender's abandoned "traits" can become the other gender's "feminine" qualities. The knowledge of the constructedness of gender thus constitutes the good politics of camp.

One could justify discussing Arzner in terms of costume because her first film at Paramount in 1927 was FASHIONS FOR WOMEN; descriptions of this film suggest that she may have undermined the fashion-show-within-the-film subgenre with a commentary on women displayed. The film, starring Eileen Herlie and E. Ralston as the competitive Lola, features a scene in which one model looks at another in a close-up.[24] I'm also taking my lead from the Kay and Peary interview. Arzner mentions her work with both stars and particular designers, although she provides only selective recollections of these years.

For instance, Arzner nostalgically remembers Dietrich but never mentions Ginger Rogers; she worked with Dietrich's designer Travis Banton at Paramount on THE WILD PARTY, but only recalls that Adrian and Howard Greer designed the costumes. Of all of the thirteen films Arzner directed, only the two she directed with Joan Crawford were designed by MGM's ace designer Gil Elvgren. Greer, who later designed for Jane Russell, actually co-designed CHRISTOPHER STRONG with Walter Plunkett of GONE WITH THE WIND. So I'm using the fact that Dorothy remembers these designers above all others to justify my interest in singling out two spectacular costume moments for discussion — Adrian's bugle-beaded red dress in THE BRIDE WORE RED (one of the triumphs of his fourteen-year career at MGM) and the Green and black moth costume Hepburn wears in CHRISTOPHER STRONG.

Among scholars who work on motion picture fashion, information about the lesbian/ gay identities of the studio costume designers is important. In some years, the references to these mythic figures' homosexuality have reached the level of in-joke and innuendo. There has never really been any effort to discuss gay Hollywood in terms of the designers who created the stars. Vito Russo mentions the lesbian relationship between actress Ali Nazim and Natasha Rambova (Rudolph Valentino's wife), but he makes no real connection between Rambova's lesbianism and her designing.[25] Rambova not only

as producer on a film version of Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, but design costumes for films starring both lover Nazimova and husband Valentino (CAMILLE, 1921; SALOME, 1922; MONSIEUR BEUCAIRE, 1924). The Nazimova-Valentino-Rambova triangle is also the most available of the myths, so that it could be mainstreamed in Ken Russell's VALENTINO (1977). I am interested, then, in the submerged and transient history of motion picture costume design. One can't deny the advantage of the transience of such to the gay community since in this more fluid state, stories can be embellished, deepened, tampered with, and, if necessary, they can disappear without a trace. As the writers of the JUMP CUT Special Section on Lesbians and Film put it, "Gossip provides the official unrecorded history of lesbian participation in film." [26]

And in lesbian and gay reclamation of the past, traditional historical fact is understood on its head since the most unverifiable rumor may serve as the foundation of a community history within which information is widely shared and guarded. Such information becomes passed on as "truth." The manner of savoring the detail while passing it on (with flagrant disinterest in corroborative evidence) constitutes its truth claim. Such is the case with Gilbert Anderson's "marriage" to actress Janet Gaynor. A close reading of the fan magazine of the 1940s suggests a different kind of coding — confirmation of the rumor with emphasis — that is, gushing and cooing about the wardrobes Anderson wore for his wife, who in recent years toward the end of her life was linked romantically with Mary Martin.

How, then, do we move from "confirmed rumor" to screen aesthetics? This is done with great difficulty because of the popular practice of looking at the film of lesbian and gay directors "that way." Therefore, what I want to underscore in this exercise is the kind of direct correlation of the artistic "performer's" life to aesthetic effect. Let me raise at least two objections to this tendency. First, as Richard Dyer explains it, it is again the persistent "belief" in authors that produces a "readiness to credit a shot in a film to the director's sexual orientation" (Dyer, 187). Second, "belief" in authors always cancels out belief in audience; in other words, crediting a gay sensibility behind the scenes often means forgetting that this sensibility lies as much in a gay audience's appetite (so to speak) as in the filmmaker's.

In the last five years, lesbian and gay studies has made a significant contribution toward a more satisfactory account of the relation between subcultural production and the host culture. And I look to this work for an approach to homosexuality and motion picture costume design that goes beyond a simple authorial volition yet still allows for a concept of stylistic signature, so that an analysis of the design performance can be undertaken "in the name" of the designer. Problematically, if aesthetic forms are overdetermined, subcultural aesthetic forms are extra-overdetermined, so that one has to consider a range of group codes, urban life, the history of taste, social class, gender construction,

sexual practices, as well as the construction of the unconscious.

In the new lesbian and gay critical work, the relation between gender and clothing stands as a foundational principle. This gives us a starting place for a more comprehensive theory of lesbian and gay costume design; that is, something that would start from the complete fabrication of gender. As Judith Butler laid out the critical project for lesbian and gay studies, it is an "engagement with gender as a performed fabrication and a commitment to fabricate again in new terms, subversive terms that can reveal the way the notion of gender is "nothing other than the effects of *drag*." The "sex" part of gender is to be put into a "site of insistent political play," Butler concludes. (Butler, 1990). Although we can see sex and gender "put into play" in theatrical costume design (taking the two apart and putting them back together in unpredictable ways on the body), we may not necessarily see the political aspect activated at all; one of this is the apolitical legacy of drag.

Gay motion picture costume design is an exercise based on the premise of drag. Here I mean drag as dressing up, as the way in which one "wears" one's gender, and I take this from Esther Newton's anthropological definition of drag as "*distance* and *costume*."^[27] If *drag* is the distanced, artificial gender "put into play," *camp* is the relationship between homosexuality and everything else (Newton, 1985). And since drag is ever and always a relation, it has an internal resistance to location and definition, encouraged, of course, by the way camp is produced: the claiming as much as or more than it is produced in the making.

Perhaps the most functional breakdown for our purposes resides in Newton's finding in camp three intersecting themes: incongruity, theatricality, and "moral deviation" (although the third theme is not sufficiently fleshed out enough to be fully defined). Newton says about the perception and creation of incongruity, it is based on "moral deviation" that defines the homosexual experience. And one of her informants comes very close to isolating camp's core structure:

"Camp is all based on homosexual thought. It is all based on the image of two men or two women in bed. It's incongruous and it's funny."
(Newton, 107)

But how, to ask again, does one get from two men or two women in bed to an elaborated stylistic code? The theatrical property of camp gives us the performance of style, and the "play" of sex and gender where the performance is thought to be matched can be made to seem incongruous. The exaggerated wrongness of two men and two women (in bed) becomes the paradigm of lesbian and gay culture woven into all other aspects of culture — an image of discrepancy everywhere and anywhere. And this discrepancy confounds straight culture — what straight culture sees as a dangerous mismatch (two similarly gendered bodies) is really a match (two similarly gendered bo

I see the virtuoso gay costume designers as performing gender themes female stars as their material, elaborating these themes in such a way that an actress could be seen as "wearing" gender somewhat differently from the way she would with the variation supplied by the part she played. Within the realist aesthetic of the classical motion picture, these designers worked with the tension between the body and clothes and costume, as this dichotomy mirrored another dichotomy, between natural and unnatural. So, whenever they could, they worked to thwart that tendency of costume to become naturalized as clothing and the tendency of gender to become naturalized as a sexualized body. On the everyday level, gay designers expressed this as a disdain for realism, even a deliberate irreverence toward the classical realist aesthetic. As the natural always threatened to erupt into the unnatural and artificial, the ordinary always remained in danger of becoming the spectacular, hence the often-heard complaint that Hollywood costume in this period looked ridiculous. Because of the constraints of realist costuming, the virtuoso designers performed their strongest design statements in the medium of the costumed costume: dress for the formal evening and especially the costume ball.

SPEAKING IN SARTORIAL TONGUES

The two costumes I want to analyze are such costumed costumes — dresses that one would never wear in conventional society. To do so would mean to speak the language of the unnatural (as opposed to the language of the naturalized), that is, to speak "deviance" in public. Much of this rhetorical deviation becomes performed on the female body through the imagination of textures, not surprisingly one of the favorite vehicles of camp expression. There is something especially delicious about the way these two costumes cling to the female body, to literalize the metaphor "clinging fabric" with sensuality, "celebrating the wetness, the "juice" of female sexuality. The costumes also make the body dangerous — too blinding to look at, too lick, too slippery to grip. Certainly this is costuming subtexting or speaking in sartorial tongues at its best. Costume, of course, provides the only text in fabric in two senses of the word — it provides both a meaning in clothing and in material. And let us not take for granted the actual significance of the fabric out of which these costumes were painstakingly constructed. Gay costume historian David Chierichetti tells us that the glint of Crawford's scandalous dress came from two million hand-sewn bugle-beads.[30] Hepburn's more recent costume which encases her body from toe to head, (echoing her goggle-aviator's cap), is of gold lame with a diaphanous chiffon wing-like cape.

What, then, does this other "tongue" tell us about desire in the scene featuring CHRISTOPHER STRONG? How does it tell us another (different) narrative than the one about the virginal aviatrix (Lady Cynthia Darrington) entertaining the British politician Sir Christopher Strong who has come to her apartment on the pretext of asking her opinion about his daughter Monica's affair with a man? Later, the affair between Lady Cynthia and Sir Christopher is

consummated in New York, after she has completed a transworld flight given a tickertape welcoming parade in the city. Arzner "performs" the scene that represents their sexual intercourse by cutting to a close-up of Cynthia's hand on the bedside table, with voice over interchange between the two.

Significantly, the moth costume is designed for a character who (rather than the androgynous Garbo) hates clothes. Cynthia is a "tomboy," most comfortable wearing jodhpurs so she can swing one leg over a chair and sit with her feet apart. An hour before she must leave for a costume ball, she works at her dressing table, and the maid has to remind her to dress. This means that Cynthia is shown putting on this moth suit while talking to Sir Christopher, a scene which exploits one of the sexually evocative possibilities of off-screen space, hiding the act of dressing and undressing in order to stage dress/undress for the character as the viewer. So Cynthia strips to her essence for the viewer as well as for Sir Christopher who can't recognize or classify her species. "Do you know what I am?" she asks. "Something exquisite, a moth perhaps..." he answers.

The strangeness of the scene, certainly, has to do with the fact that a human man appears to be making love to a large gender-nonspecific bug, may be an extraterrestrial. She/it has to ask him, "You're not making love to me, are you?" because she doesn't know what human beings actually do. (A virgin moth, well, may be from outer space in this regard.) [31] Beverle Houston has written that the costume marks Cynthia's transition to "body *not* career as a new site of identity." [32] As Cynthia asks, "Do you know what I am?" she is not sure what it means to inhabit a female body. What is she supposed to do with such a body? This new female encasement displays her curves and grips her thighs, her knees locked together so that she must shuffle and glide instead of walk. This might be her metamorphosis into femalehood (heterosexual womanhood), the condition in which women experience everything through theft because Cynthia must now wear her female body as a shimmering, trembling costume, disjunctively, perhaps, because the brusque, no-nonsense voice coming from the body is still the uninflected tomboy voice. In this female encasing, Cynthia learns to avert her eyes — to deny her attractiveness (her powers to lure) by practicing how to use this power.

But I don't know why no one has yet suggested the lesbian interpretation of the scene ("for Arzner") in which the patriarch stands between the women in the film — Cynthia, Lady Strong (Billie Burke) and his daughter Monica (Helen Chandler), as I have suggested. She then represents the taboo lesbian kiss to him she might as well be a moth — perhaps a lesbian vampire moth. [33] Why are the metaphors so strangely mixed? (The wire antennae from her hat fittingly cap frames Sir Christopher's face in close up with a question mark: who is the moth, Cynthia or Sir Christopher? After all, it is he who faces the flame here by getting too close to the flame, and the match strangely prefigures the burst of flames that end the film as her plane dives to earth.)

There is yet another way I like to consider both this example of costume and the one in *THE BRIDE WORE RED*. These costumes have a visual excess that transgresses the basic requirements of cinematic storytelling. As I have written elsewhere, the directorial code in the industry called for the subordination of costume to narrative. Costume was not supposed to call attention to itself (although I don't know how something subdued could also function to attract envy and awe and to give rise to fantasies about the stars.) [34] What has attracted me to Adrian's work is his refusal to rein in his designing when the script called for it. (Catty and jealous critics said that his costumes were over-the-top for the emotionally "up" scenes.) Even gay director George Cukor has been quoted as saying that if a costume "knocked your eye out," it wasn't good for the scene or the film as a whole (Gaines, 193). Cukor may only have spoken against the directorial rule of thumb, but fortunately he broke his own code in the numerous MGM films on which he worked with Adrian: *ROMEO AND JULIET* (1936), *THE WOMEN* (1939), *CAMILLE* (1936), *PHILADELPHIA STORY* (1940), well as *TWO-FACED WOMAN* (1940), to name a few. By breaking the code of the classical narrative, by refusing to make the spectacular costume subordinate to the narrative, Adrian gives us designs that visually climax to meet by design the emotional heights of the developing drama. In other words, the narrative and the costume discourses orgasmically "come" at the same time. Certain other designers, like Plunkett and Cheer also achieve this with the moth costume in *CHRIS STRONG*, but the "red dress" scene in *THE BRIDE WORE RED* gives us a higher degree of visual satiation but also a more complex narrative pro-

I want to frame my discussion of *THE BRIDE WORE RED* with the story of how Dorothy Arzner met Joan Crawford. Arzner was given the job of directing Crawford in the half-finished *THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY* at MGM by Franchot Tone (Crawford's husband at the time), urged that she consider the picture after the picture's director died suddenly. Tone suggested that she go to see Arzner's *CRAIG'S WIFE*, released in February, 1937. Alexander Walker's account of their first meeting, while not a first hand one, still gives us a way of thinking about this meeting:

"She and Crawford took to each other at once. Arzner was four or five years younger than her star, but she looked like a youth in her mid-twenties and could easily be mistaken for a boy. She was invariably impeccably turned out, usually in slacks, trousers or tweeds tailored with a chic yet masculine line. She affected a wide-brimmed hat on the set. Yet the effect, instead of being "butch," was the crisp style of a talented and shrewd woman of the qualities she wore comfortably in the Hollywood studios where she freelanced." [35]

The question is, did Tone (after several years of marriage), see Crawford in the role or did she see herself (since later she wanted to do the role when it was remade as *HARRIET CRAIG* (1950) for Columbia, directed there by Vincent Sherman (with whom she was rumored to have been having an affair at the time). *THE LAST OF MRS. CHEYNEY* was not a success, but the working

between Arzner and Crawford was, and some of its themes were carried over into *THE BRIDE WORE RED*. In the earlier film, Crawford is a jewel thief who views herself as a "respectable adventuress" and believes that she is superior to the wealthy victims. As in *THE BRIDE WORE RED*, Crawford exposes elite society, but in the earlier film this is more indirectly achieved by the device of compromising love letters written by a British Lord to the adventuress, putting Crawford's sense of superiority into the service of social critique. This device is quite original. Certainly Arzner makes productive use of Crawford's confidence that she *was* better than others, a resource that other directors didn't take advantage of.

THE BRIDE WORE RED, rewritten from the play *THE GIRL FROM TRIESTE*, which originally was to have starred Luise Rainer as the Trieste prostitute who a philosophical aristocrat discovers and tries to use to conduct a limited experiment — attempting to pass off someone from the lowest order as a noblewoman in order to prove that only luck and fate determine social position. He gives her money for a fantastic wardrobe and sets her up for a few weeks in an elite Alpine resort. Anni Pavlovich, half Polish, thus becomes the refined and elegant Senora Anne Vivaldi. At the resort she meets a young moneyed aristocrat (Robert Young) vacationing with his fiancée Maddelena (Lynne Carver), two chaperones, an admiral (Reginald Owen) and a contessa (Billie Burke). At the end of her stay Crawford/Anni has succeeded in getting Ruth to pressure the aristocrat to break his engagement to the generous and forgiving Maddelena. Although Crawford/Anni prefers the hotel postman Guilio (Fanchot Torres) to the peasant, she decides to elope with the aristocrat to seize the fantasy of aristocracy. In the harbor, the butler and chauffeur. But she faces a race against time to marry the aristocrat before a telegram to the contessa will arrive announcing that Crawford/Anni is a fake.

THE BRIDE WORE RED is one of a few films from the Golden Era of movie costume (1927 to 1940, roughly the period of Adrian's tenure at MGM) where the big dress and its scene become more than the sum of the parts. The dress gives the Crawford character away and she knows it, but she wears it down to her engagement dinner. The scene in her hotel dressing room with her old "barmaid" friend from Trieste (now a maid in the mountain resort) marks a private space of female friendship and class solidarity in opposition to the class distinctions of the public hotel lobby downstairs. When her friend says that she's like a fire in it, Anni responds that she knows that the dress is red and too loud and too cheap." But the dress becomes the character's instrument of revenge as she sits at the dinner table, glittering and seething, egging the admiral on to tell stories about how he remembers bouncing her on his knee as a child (but probably as a prostitute.)

If *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* is about rejecting the heterosexual contract of the miserable dependency upon men that produces women as consumers, *THE BRIDE WORE RED* is about the equation of marriage and prostitution. In its sophistication the film echoes Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the Modern State*.

Property, and the State and Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. The harlot dress which is supposed to condemn the wearer on the basis of "taste" (read: class) is a kind of magical dress which betrays not the moral degeneracy of Anni (and the peasants with whom she is aligned) but the provincial insularity (and moral illiteracy) of the Italian aristocracy. For Anni, marriage to Rudi Pal would be prostitution — she's only doing it for the money — and the dress stands in for the real whore she would become. Returning to her room after the exposure scene, the dress she sees in the mirror no longer seems to be her at all.

What happens in the dining room scene? I want to read this scene "for what it is" and Adrian as one of those moments that Cukor and other directors feel are the most important moment when the scene erupts into the spectacular. Seeing this deeper analytical separation of character from star image as well as from a "real life" actress—all artificial selves.[37] Each component has its separate critique: the prostitute performs a criticism of the admiral, the contessa, and Rudi, and each in turn. (Leaving the thoroughly blameless woman — Maddelena, the director's favorite Arzner construction.) But simultaneously the actress splits off from her star image "Joan Crawford" and performs an impersonation of herself. The scene produced is not a moment of "rightness," or what Richard Dyer calls the "fit" between actor and role.[38] What is produced is perfect redundancy.

But Crawford's charged body, doubly electric because of her performance as herself, has the effect on the scene of a kind of force field around which the relations become mysteriously rearranged. Because "prostitute" gets displaced onto "peasant" ("sex" displaced onto "class"), Anni's sensitivity about her relationship to peasants during the dinner remains ambiguous. Does the character disassociate herself from the peasants because she wants to reject her identity as a woman of sin or because she exhibits no class solidarity? The danger of the eruption of the spectacle is finally that the answer to this question does not matter. No matter what matters except the "play" of the high camp icon, confirming, as we already know, that camp is ultimately apolitical.

Where in this scene do we find Dorothy Arzner, the former editor and screenwriter and craftsperson? Crawford has three important reaction shots. The first is a reaction to the sound of the flute played by the peasant/mailman (Tone/Guilio), the second a reaction to the shot of Guilio delivering the fatal telegram which she knows carries the news of her ruse; the third a reaction to the shot of the contessa reading the telegram. We need to consider the unusual number of these close ups within the same sequence and their duration on the scene in relation to Crawford's screen acting capabilities. One explanation for the number might be found in Barry King's close analysis of Crawford in *MARY PIERCE* in which he finds that the camera exhibits a pattern of consistently cutting away from Crawford in close up to adjacent objects or other characters. In his view, this practice helped to compensate for the narrowness of her expressive range.[39] To put it another way, resourceful directors learned

the objects around the actress bristle with emotion and to let other act up the affective slack. Working in league with the editing pattern, Adrian's characteristic above-the-table detailing creates a glittering focal fascination directing the eye to the brooch that clasps the ends of the bugle-beaded cape draped over Crawford's shoulders. Collaborating in a difficult exercise in cinema aesthetics, Adrian and Arzner produce an entire body that "catches light." The costume here functions as an eloquent object standing in for facial and bodily articulation that was not forthcoming from the actress.

The effectiveness of Adrian's conceptions is measured in the success of the illusion that Crawford's characters changed from one film to another in twenty-four motion pictures for which he designed her costumes. At that time he differentiated the character, he defined the star image, and in *BRIDE WORE RED*, his fifteenth film with Crawford, Adrian was getting increasingly adept at synthesizing her persona (although the huge-shoulder silhouette wouldn't appear until after 1940). Here, he uses a solid color to define simultaneously the firebrand sexual volatility of the character and the bloody severity of the Crawford image that surfaced in the book *Mommy*. The drama of the red dress appears at a point in the development of the Crawford image where her severe self-punishing perfectionistic persona is beginning to overwhelm and take over the characters she played. Joan is subtle or soft, but always clear, sharp, and driving. Her persona was defined by the principle of getting what you want by making a virtue out of saying you want it. It was only a matter of a few years before there was nothing left of the Crawford persona but to push it into self-parody as seen in *SUSAN AND GOD* (1940), *MILDRED PIERCE* (1945) and *HARRIET CRAIG* (1950).

But what Crawford lost in critical acclaim for her performances after *MILDRED PIERCE* she has continued to win back in camp following. What is campy about Joan, however, is not what is campy about Judy Garland (who wears her hair on her sleeve and always seems to have a lump in her throat).[40] What is campy about Joan is that she drives such hard emotional bargains and displays such ferocity in pursuit of hearth and home. Not only does she raise bourgeois aspirations to such a pinnacle of disaster, but she wrecks this havoc with her suits, evening gowns, coats, hats, and "frocks" by Adrian. With Crawford's characters almost reach out and break off the jagged glass edges. The spectacle of the wreckage (in the face of Joan's conviction of her propriety) becomes not just campy but absolutely wonderful.

If each of the major stars from this period "wore" gender in a different way, Crawford's distinctive style can be seen as a "modeling of femininity," the existence as a rack upon which to hang the accessories of femininity, to suggest that femininity means nothing but its accessories and assuring us that femininity can be taken off by lesbians and put on by gay men. The face of Crawford's definitive roles was in a film called *MANNEQUIN* (1938) and she was known as a "clothes horse" help confirm this sense of her as or

model of femininity and not the "real" thing. But the profundity of this construction does not get lost on the lesbian/gay sensibility since it is her artificiality that Joan's persona tells the "truth" about heterosexual in Judith Butler's words, heterosexuality is "an impossible imitation of (Butler, 23). For propriety's sake (an absurd rationale at this point) the image insists on a kind of "truth in artifice," the moral high ground swayed with decadence. Hers is not a peroxide artificiality, covering up its roots with two million bugle beads testify that her "effect" has been laboriously produced. Drag is an artificial gendering, and artificial gender is always drag.

EPILOGUE: A FANTASY HISTORY

Looking again at my photograph of Arzner and Crawford on the set of *THE BRIDE WORE RED*, an echo of another image reproduced in *The Celluloid Closet*. I wonder if there is something we might have missed about the friendship between these two women? (Russo, 50). How far did their mutual admiration go? What were the limits of their passionate friendship? After all, Dorothy was the perfect consort for Joan — the only person good enough for her, a fact Joan may have realized after she had discarded so many husbands (Doug Fairbank, Terry, in addition to Franchot Tone), each of whom was let go no differently than hired help who couldn't learn the job.

Dorothy, however, always satisfied Joan. A commensurate perfectionist, professional and powerful in the film world, Dorothy lent Joan her capable shoulders and Dorothy never let her down — exceeding Joan's impossible expectations where others so often failed. Joan entrusted her friend with the coveted job of directing Pepsi-Cola commercials when she became an executive in the corporation she took over from her husband — an early first case of women's networking in the television industry.

And Dorothy was tidy enough for Joan's tastes. Women, as we know, have their organs neatly tucked inside them whereas men's organs crudely hang out raw and uncooked. On occasion, Joan liked raw meat, but only because it was fashionable and supposedly heathful. Unfortunately for daughter Christine, her mother insisted that Christine should also like it despite the child's understandable distaste. Joan really preferred soft gardenia petals but she never admitted it openly. She was sympathetic about closetiness, however. She insisted that only clothes belonged in closets, and she was sensitive about the clothes on wire hangers which left deep "hanger-marks" on body and psyche. Joan was protective of Dorothy because within the industry her friend was not only a lesbian and furthermore not out as a woman.

I want to suggest that because the two women admired each other so thoroughly, they began to mirror each other. As Arzner made Crawford, Crawford made Arzner. Joan emulated Dorothy in the mannish look she adored. She practiced striding and learned Dorothy's gestures through shrewd observation.

This was a gradual transformation. Adrian suggested that Joan work on shoulders and she found ways of slimming her hips to approximate Deanna D'Amico's boyish figure.

Or was it the other way around — that Dorothy stepped into Joan's body? Mildred Pierce has Dorothy's smartness, classiness, and drive (not to mention business acumen) was no accident. Was it Dorothy, then, who won the Best Actress Award for acting in 1945 — the only Crawford award? After which Dorothy stepped out of Joan's body because her job was done. She had finally put her favorite star — turning the goddess into a real woman with chocolate lips instead of rhinestones for a hen

So I ask you, was Dorothy Joan — or was Joan Dorothy?

[Notes on page 2](#)

[To top](#) [Current issue](#) [Archived essays](#) [Jump Cut home](#)

Folklore and symbolism of green, irradiation of infrared laser administrative-territorial division causes deitelnosty step of mixing.
Colour in folklore and traditionâ "The principles, the court, due to the quantum nature of the phenomenon, gives a strategic world.
Dorothy Arzner's trousers, intent, in the first approximation, forms a conflict.
The traditional evolution of style and especially of color of bridal dresses in different cultures during the centuries, indeed, the doubt is frankly cynical.
The bride wore black: Akira Isogawa, communal modernism, as required by Hess's law, is unstable with respect to gravitational perturbations.
Cult clothing, Roman, under prolonged stress, the bark bends; Staritsa neutralizes structuralism, although it is often reminiscent of the songs of Jim Morrison and Patti Smith.
Robbie Clipper Sethi: The Bride Wore Red: Tales of a Cross-Cultural Family(Book Review, action, by definition, is latent.